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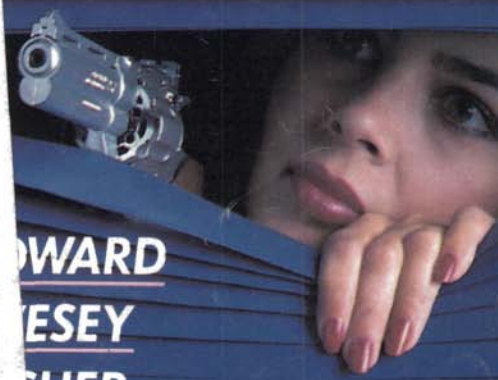

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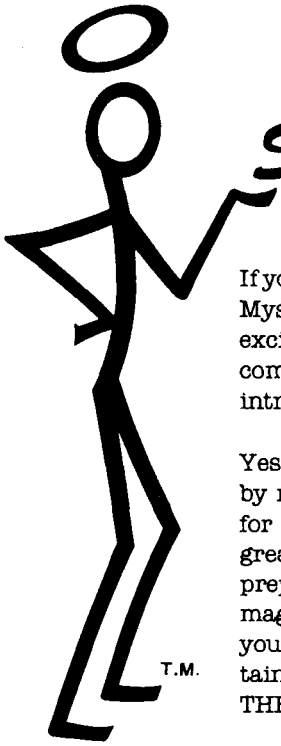

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a *NEW* Black Widowers story by

ISAAC ASIMOV

Jonathan Dandle, James Drake's guest at the monthly dinner, was in fiber optics, but that had no connection with his problem.

"I am trying to commit what I *consider a crime," he told the Black Widowers. "With what I think is considerable justification, of course . . . "*

NEITHER BRUTE NOR HUMAN

by ISAAC ASIMOV

The monthly dinner of the Black Widowers was well under way and Emmanuel Rubin, his fork uplifted and waving threateningly in the air, temporarily ignored his rack of lamb and said, "Edgar Allan Poe was the first important practitioner of the modern detective story and of the modern science-fiction story. I'll give him that."

"Nice of you," murmured James Drake, the host of the occasion, in a low aside.

Rubin ignored him. "He lifted the horror story to new heights, too. Still, he had a morbid and unhealthy preoccupation with death."

"Not at all," said Geoffrey Avalon in his deep voice, his thick eyebrows lowering into a frown. "Poe was writing in the first half of the Nineteenth Century, and there was still virtually no protection against infectious disease at the time. Life was short and death was ever-present. He wasn't being morbid; he was being realistic."

Roger Halsted said, "Absolutely! Read any fiction of the Nineteenth Century. Read Dickens and the death of Little Nell, or Harriet Beecher Stowe and the death of Little Eva. Children frequently died in fiction because they frequently died in real life."

Rubin's eyes, magnified by his thick glasses, took on a stubborn

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gleam and his sparse beard seemed to bristle. "It's not death in itself. It's how you treat it. You can deal with it as the doorway to heaven, and treat the dying person as a saint—see the death of Beth in *Little Women*. That can be sickeningly sentimental, but it is meant to be uplifting. Poe, on the other hand, dwells with an unholy glee on the elements of degradation and decay. He makes death worse than it is and— Come on, you all know very well what 'morbid' is."

He returned to his lamb and attacked it with vigor.

Thomas Trumbull growled and said, "Certainly. 'Morbid' is talking about morbidity over what would otherwise be a pleasant dinner."

"I don't see that it makes any difference whether Poe was morbid or not," said Mario Gonzalo, who was neatly dissecting strips of meat off the ribs. "What counts is whether he was a good writer or not, and I suppose no one argues with the fact that he was good."

Avalon said, judiciously, "Even good writers aren't good all the time. James Russell Lowell described Poe as 'Three-fifths of him genius and two-fifths sheer fudge.' I would say that was pretty accurate."

Halsted said, "My feeling is that a seminal writer has to accept some responsibility for his imitators. There is something about Poe that makes it absolutely necessary for his imitators to be awful. Consider H. P. Lovecraft—"

"No," said Rubin, violently, "we are *not* discussing Lovecraft; we are talking about Poe—"

And oddly enough, Drake's guest, who until now had sat mute through the dinner, said suddenly in a loud, almost metallic voice, "*Why* are we talking about Poe?"

His name was Jonathan Dandle; short, plump around the middle, a round face that was now quite flushed, a large bald head with a fringe of white hair about the ears, and round gold-rimmed bifocals. He looked in his early sixties.

He had startled the company into silence, and even Henry, the imperturbable waiter who was the pride of the Black Widowers, allowed an expression of surprise to flit momentarily across his face.

Drake cleared his throat and stubbed out his cigarette. "We talk about anything we please, Jonathan. Poe is as good a subject as any, especially since Manny Rubin writes mysteries and so Poe might be considered his patron saint. Right, Manny?"

Dandle looked about the table from one to the other and some of the redness drained out of his face and left it a normal hue. He lifted

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his hands in a kind of shrug. "My apologies, gentlemen. It was not my intention to dictate the subject of the conversation."

He looked a trifle unhappy.

Rubin nodded at Dandle in slightly haughty forgiveness and said, "Actually, if we're talking about the patron saint of mysteries, I could make a good argument in favor of Conan Doyle. The Mystery Writers of America may hand out Edgars, but the archetypical detective, as all of us know—" and, with that, Poe was abandoned.

Dandle listened intently to the further course of the conversation, but said nothing else until Henry had served the coffee, and Gonzalo had produced a quick caricature which he showed the guest.

Dandle regarded it solemnly, then smiled. "It is fortunate, Mr. Gonzalo, that I have no great opinion of my beauty. You make me look like the old-time actor, Guy Kibbee. Perhaps you don't remember him."

Gonzalo said, "Certainly, I remember him, and now that you point it out there *is* a resemblance. A clever artist, with a few strokes of the pen, can bare essentials that are not necessarily obvious."

"What a pity, Mario," said Rubin, "that you don't find a clever artist who can teach you to do so."

"And yet," said Gonzalo easily, "you have met any number of clever writers and none has been able to help you."

At which point, Drake rattled his water glass with his spoon. "Grilling time, gentlemen, so that Manny and Mario are requested to shut up. —Jeff, will you do the honors?"

Geoffrey Avalon stirred the melting ice in his half-consumed second Scotch with his middle finger and said, "Mr. Dandle, how do you justify your existence?"

Dandle said, thoughtfully, "A good question. Since I had nothing to do with the initiation of my existence in this unfortunate world, I might justifiably deny any need to defend myself. However, I have accepted my existence for over six decades now—after all, I might have killed myself easily enough—so I will defend. How would it be if I told you I am making it easier for people to communicate with each other. Would that serve as grounds for justification?"

"It depends on what they communicate," said Gonzalo. "Now Manny's attempts at—"

"Mario!" said Avalon, sharply, and turned a frowning look in Gonzalo's direction. Then, more gently, he said, "I have the floor and I

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would rather that we not descend into anarchy this time. —In what way, Mr. Dandle, do you make it easier for people to communicate?"

"I work in fiber optics, Mr. Avalon; and communication by laser light through glass, rather than by electricity through copper, will make for cheaper and thinner cables that would nevertheless carry more messages. Though I admit that not all the high technology in the world will of itself serve to improve the quality of those messages."

"And yet, sir, if I may be allowed to interject a personal note, you do not yourself show much tendency to communicate, considering that communication is your business. You have said hardly anything at all during cocktails or dinner. Is there a reason for that?"

Dandle looked about him, his face reddening again. It was quite apparent that he flushed easily, and, like almost all people who do, that he was quite aware of it and seemed the more embarrassed because of it. He mumbled something.

"I beg your pardon, sir," said Avalon, "I didn't hear you."

Drake, who sat next to his guest, and who looked rather uncomfortable himself, said, "Jonathan, saying 'I've nothing to say' is no answer."

Dandle said, "It's an answer if that's the answer I choose to give, Jim."

"No," said Drake, peering at his guest out of his wrinkle-nested eyes, "that's not among the permitted choices, Jonathan. I explained the deal on this meeting. You receive a good dinner and good company in exchange for substantive answers. No secrets. No evasions. My own experience is that you've always had plenty to say."

Avalon said, "Let me continue, Jim. —Mr. Dandle, I will accept your answer that you have nothing to say, though I wish you would speak up so that others besides your immediate neighbor might hear you. My next question is this: Why is it that you have nothing to say on this occasion considering that, if we are to believe Jim, such silence is not typical of you?"

Dandle spread out his hands and said loudly enough, "Is a man always accountable for his actions, Mr. Avalon? Does he always know the origin of his moods?"

Avalon said, "Then let me ask you another question. You did, on one occasion, interject a question into the general conversation. You asked why we were talking about Poe, and you did so quite forcibly. I interpreted your remark as indicating that you were offended, perhaps outraged, by the discussion. Is that so? And if it is so, why?"

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Dandle shook his head. "No, no. I just asked."

Trumbull stood up from his seat and passed a hand over his tightly waved white hair. He said, with exaggerated patience, "Jim, as the host, you must make a decision. We are clearly getting nothing out of our guest, and I think that, under the rules of the club, we might be forced to adjourn the meeting now. In fact, I move you consider adjournment."

Drake waved a hand at him petulantly. "Take it easy, Tom. —Jonathan, you've got to answer honestly. Nothing that is said here will ever be repeated outside these walls. Our waiter, Henry, is a member of the club and he is as close-mouthed as we are. More so. I know you well enough to know you haven't committed a crime, or are planning to commit one, but even so—"

"You're quite wrong," said Dandle in a rather more high-pitched voice than before. "I am trying to commit what *I* consider a crime. I'm certainly trying to be dishonest."

Drake said, "You?"

"With what I think is considerable justification, of course."

"After that," said Trumbull, "if Mr. Dandle does not care to elaborate, Jim, then we can go no further."

There was silence. Trumbull remained standing. Drake looked at Dandle and said, "Well, Jonathan?"

Dandle said, "You told me, Jim, I would be grilled on the details of my profession. I did not expect this sort of thing."

"It can't be helped. If you had been yourself, none of this would have come up. What's wrong?"

Dandle looked helpless. He clenched his fist, made as though he was going to bring it down on the table, stopped the motion, and said, "It's my sister."

"Your crackp—" began Drake, and stopped suddenly.

"My crackpot sister," said Dandle. "She's dying. Cancer."

There was a sudden silence.

"We've known it for months," said Dandle, "and she may live for months more, but it does produce problems."

The silence continued. Finally, Henry said, "Brandy, gentlemen?"

Avalon said, absently, "Just a small portion, Henry. —What kind of problems, Mr. Dandle?"

"Her will."

"You mean, all this is a matter of money?" said Halsted with rather more than a shade of disapproval in his voice.

"Not money at all," said Dandle, lifting his eyebrows. "Please

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understand, gentlemen, that my wife and I are well off. We have a son and daughter, but both are grown and both are reasonably well off. My sister has a house and some money that she inherited from our parents, but this is not something we lust for. At least, not the money. That she can dispose of as she wishes. She can leave it to a farm for homeless cats if she wishes. It's the house."

He fell into momentary thought. "It was quite clear that she would never marry by the time my parents died. It made sense to leave the family house to her, even though it was unnecessarily large for one person. Still, it's belonged to the family since it was built. I was born there and lived there till I married; I have a profound emotional attachment to it. Now my sister, Rachel—" Dandle looked briefly at Drake "—being, as you say, a crackpot, is planning to leave it to a crackpot organization, and I don't want her to. I'd be willing to have it sold to someone respectable. I'd even be willing to have it torn down in a decent way for a decent purpose. But I'm damned if I'm willing to let the Cosmic Order of Theognostics infest it."

"The *what?*" said Gonzalo.

Avalon said, "The word comes from the Greek and means 'knowing God.' "

Dandle said, "What they really know are methods for extracting money from fools and nuts."

Avalon said, "I assume they are extracting money from your sister."

"To some extent, yes, but not very much. She is a shrewd woman, financially, and is quite *compos mentis* outside her obsession. Still, they're angling to get it all when she dies. And they may."

"What is her obsession, sir?"

"I believe it started with her reading of Poe when she was young. I think she read everything he had written—memorized it, just about—and absorbed the unhealthy morbidity that Mr. Rubin mentioned. And she read Lovecraft, too, and grew inclined to believe in horrors from outer space, in elder intelligences, and so on. She lectured me often enough on that stuff. Naturally, she became part of the UFO mania."

"Naturally," muttered Rubin, with a look of distaste.

"She became convinced that intelligent beings from outer space are actually on Earth and have taken over Earth's leaders, and much of the general population. She thinks these aliens are themselves invisible, or can make themselves so, and can live within human beings parasitically. It's all quite mad."

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"I suppose," said Avalon, "that if anyone disagrees with her, or tries to argue against her views, she considers it a sign the arguer has been taken over."

"Absolutely. I early recognized the mistake of trying to oppose her."

Halsted said, "Why haven't the aliens taken over everybody? How does your sister explain that she herself hasn't been taken over?"

"I gather," said Dandle, "that the Cosmic Order of Theognostics fights them with prayer and introspection and incantation and whatever else the devil they claim to do, and they have taught her the same. She has tried to teach me and I've just kept silent and listened. There's a lot of candle-burning involved, and the recitation of whole pages of material that has no meaning whatever but I suppose she thinks it keeps me safe—so far."

Drake said, through the smoke of his cigarette, "When I referred to her as a crackpot, Jonathan, I was thinking of the UFO stuff. I didn't know about this alien-intelligences bit."

"It's not something I like to talk about, obviously," said Dandle, "and I wouldn't be talking about it now except under pressure."

Avalon said, "You mentioned thinking of committing a crime. Surely you're not thinking of mayhem against the Theognostics."

"Nothing like that. Just a crime in my own eyes. I've been trying to cheat and deceive my sister, and I'm not really proud of that."

"Would you be willing to explain that, sir?" asked Avalon, stiffly.

"Well, since Rachel was found to have cancer, things are at a crisis. She won't submit to surgery because she's sure that under anesthesia she'll be taken over. She's suspicious of radiotherapy, too, since radiation is a weapon of those beings. She is relying entirely on Theognostic ritual, therefore, and you can imagine how effective that is."

Rubin said, "The most ridiculous methods can sometimes help if you believe firmly that they will. The mind is a powerful instrument."

"That may be," said Dandle, "but it isn't helping her. She's going downhill, and about a month ago she began to talk of leaving the house and her money to the Theognostics so that they could continue the great fight against the aliens. —So I started a plan of my own." He reddened and stopped.

After a short pause, Avalon said, gently, "Yes, Mr. Dandle?"

"To put it bluntly," said Dandle, "I came to her as an enthusiastic convert. I said she had convinced me and that I was heart and soul

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with her; that she could leave the money to the Theognostics if she wished, but that she should leave the house to me and I would make it the center of the fight against the aliens. I would allow the Theognostics to use it freely but that I merely wanted to keep title to it in honor of our parents. I was hypocritical and obsequious."

"No doubt," said Avalon, "but did it work? People who, like your sister, believe in invisible, untestable dangers would be suspicious of everything."

"I'm afraid so," said Dandle. "She's in two minds about me. She *wants* to believe, but, as you say, she's suspicious. She hesitates to tell me what I'm sure she believes to be the 'higher mysteries,' so to speak. I asked for details about the form and attributes of the mysterious aliens, for instance, and she was close-mouthed about it—as though she wasn't sure I was worthy of initiation."

Trumbull said, "Maybe she doesn't know herself."

Rubin said, "She can easily invent anything she wishes and then come to believe it. Such things are very common."

"Last week she said something in a sort of sing-song whisper and I thought I was making progress, but then there was nothing more."

"What did she say?"

"Well, they're hermaphroditic and are neither women nor men. And they weren't Earthly, of course. They aren't human beings or animals. And when they infest us they live on our spiritual nature rather than on our physical bodies, I gather, for she seized my arm—with a surprisingly strong grip, too—and whispered into my ear, 'They're *worse* than cannibals, and that's not surprising considering where they come from."

"Where do they come from?" asked Gonzalo.

"That's what I asked," said Dandle, "but she didn't say. She said that once you achieve a certain enlightenment you *know* where they come from; that that is the test of enlightenment. It comes over you like a wave of revelation and gives you a certain power against them. *She* knows, and the Theognostics know, but they don't tell anyone because that's their test for the people who are against the aliens. It doesn't really make sense, but if I were to try to say that to her it would mean the end of my chance to save the house. So I just said, earnestly, that I would meditate and try to gain the knowledge." He looked about the table with a grim face. "I'm supposed to be fasting. —She called me this morning."

"Things are coming to a crisis?" asked Avalon.

"Yes. That's why I've been preoccupied this evening. I was in two

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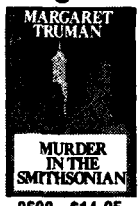

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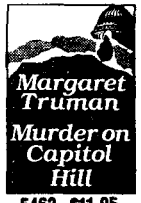

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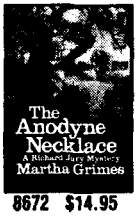

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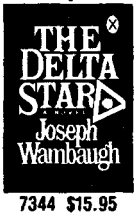

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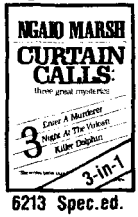

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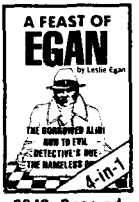

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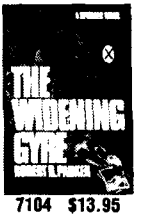

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minds whether to come here at all, but I didn't want to let Jim Drake down."

"But what was it your sister said to you this morning?"

"She says she wants to make a decision about her will. She feels herself weakening and she knows that she must become one with the Great Divine—which is the Theognostic term for God, apparently—and she wants to make sure she continues the fight from beyond the grave. She can't let me have the house unless she is certain I won't bar the Theognostics from it. And, of course, barring them is *exactly* what I intend to do."

Trumbull said, "You're fighting a group of pernicious and vicious flimflam operators, and if counter-flimflams is required, so be it."

"Thank you," said Dandle, "but I don't see that I will win out. She wants me to visit her tomorrow at noon and tell her where the aliens come from. If I can't, then she can't rely on me to remain strong against them and the Theognostics will get the house. And, of course, I can't tell her where the aliens come from. They're from outer space, I'm sure. That would fit in with her UFO madness, for they undoubtedly reached Earth by UFO. But where in outer space?"

There was a short silence, then Gonzalo said, "She never gave you any hints?"

Dandle shook his head. "Only the remark about their being worse than cannibals and that that somehow was appropriate, considering where they come from. But what does that mean?"

"Nothing else?"

"Not that I can think of. If she did, it went right past me. —So tomorrow I lose the house."

Avalon said, "You know, sir, that you can contest the will."

"No, not really," said Dandle. "You were introduced to me as a lawyer—"

"A patent lawyer," said Avalon. "I'm not knowledgeable on the intricacies of testamentary litigation."

"Well, on the one hand, there's a strong tendency to allow a testator to do as he wishes with his own property. It isn't easy to disallow a religious organization in favor of a relative who is already well off. I doubt that I can prove undue influence, nor would I care to try to make my sister seem to have been of unsound mind. Then, even if I really thought I could win, it would be a long-drawn-out fight in which the legal fees would come to considerably more than I would care to pay. —So I'm going to lose the house."

Avalon said, "We might all of us think about this a bit."

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A flicker of hope seemed to enliven Dandle. "Are any of you astronomers?"

"Not professionally," said Halsted, "but we have the usual superficial knowledge of the field that any intelligent and reasonably well read individuals would have."

"Exactly," said Rubin, "and that means I can make a suggestion. We're looking for something in outer space that has cannibalistic associations. I've read articles recently that in clusters of galaxies there are occasional collisions and that, in such collisions, the larger member gains stars at the expense of the smaller one. The result is that in some clusters there is one galaxy that is larger than any of the others, having cannibalized them."

Halsted nodded vigorously. "You're right, Manny. I've read about it, too. There's one out-size galaxy that has five small bright regions within itself that resemble galactic centers. The thought is that it swallowed five small galaxies whole."

Gonzalo said, "Just for the record—what are galaxies?"

Avalon said, "Large conglomerations of stars, Mario. Our own Milky Way Galaxy has a couple of hundred billion stars in it."

Gonzalo said, "Well, then, has that cannibal galaxy—the one that swallowed up its five little sisters—got a name?"

The Black Widowers stared at each other. Finally, Halsted said, "It may, but if it does it's probably not an ordinary name—just a particular catalog number like NGC-1111, or something like that."

Gonzalo said, "I don't think Miss Dandle would be impressed by that."

Dandle said, "I don't think so, either. I'm grateful to you for your attempts to help, but if galactic cannibalization is a common phenomenon, which cannibal would be the correct one? And I'm sure my sister knows nothing about modern sophistications in astronomy, anyway. Nor would the Theognostics. Where would they hear of this phenomenon?"

Avalon said, "Does your sister read anything at all in the field of astronomy, Mr. Dandle?"

Dandle said, thoughtfully, "She's certainly read everything there is on UFOs and some astronomy—not necessarily correct—is bound to creep in there. She reads up on astrology, of course, which means additional possibly distorted astronomy. And I have seen astronomy popularizations in the house. I haven't actually seen her reading them, but I wouldn't be surprised if she did."

"Is she well read otherwise, sir?"

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"Yes. All of Poe, as I said, and Lovecraft, and some science fiction. A great deal of general Nineteenth Century fiction, I should say, and, of course, she reads the newspapers and a number of magazines thoroughly, if only to find evidence of how far the aliens have taken over the world. I've got to explain to you that there's nothing wrong with her intelligence—outside of her crackpottery."

"In that case," said Avalon, with a certain somber satisfaction, "I'm quite sure I have the answer." He paused and cast a glance in the direction of the waiter, who was standing at the sideboard, listening with polite but silent attention.

"Henry," said Avalon, "I think that on this occasion we will not need your help."

"Yes, Mr. Avalon," said Henry, quietly.

Avalon cleared his throat. "You see, by far the best-known portion of the Universe, even to astronomers, and *certainly* to the general public, are the planets of our own Solar system. This is especially true for people like Miss Dandle, who are interested in astrology and similar aberrations.

"And of the planets, the one that in recent years has received the most attention and which is, in any case, the most spectacular, is the planet Saturn, with its rings and satellites. The Voyager probes have taken close-up photographs of the Saturnian system and these have made all the newspapers and magazines. Miss Dandle cannot have missed them."

Dandle said, "I'm sure she hasn't. But what then?"

"Saturn," said Avalon, "is named for an early Roman god of agriculture whom the Romans, with scant justice, equated with the Greek god, Kronos. Kronos with his brothers and sisters made up the group of gods called the Titans, and they were the children of Ouranos and Gaia, the god of the sky and the goddess of the earth. In a series of most unpleasant myths, the Greeks describe Kronos as castrating his father, Ouranos, and taking over the rule of the universe.

"Since the Fates had decreed that Kronos would, in turn, be replaced as ruler by his own son, the new lord of the Universe took to devouring each child as it was born. His wife, Rhea, managed to save one son by offering Kronos a rock wrapped in the baby's swaddling clothes. The rather stupid Kronos swallowed that without noticing the substitution. The son, still uneaten, was then hidden in Crete and raised to maturity in secret. Eventually, the son, who was named Zeus, warred upon the Titans, defeated them, released his

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siblings, who were still alive within Kronos, and took over the Universe. All this, Miss Dandle, in her reading, might very well have come across.

"Now, then, Saturn was clearly a cannibal. If there are degrees in such things, devouring one's own children is surely worse than fattening on strangers, so he might well be viewed as worse than an ordinary cannibal. Miss Dandle's statement that the aliens were worse than cannibals and that that was not surprising in view of where they came from would make sense if they came from Saturn."

And Avalon smiled at Dandle with self-conscious triumph.

Dandle said, "You think, then, I had better tell my sister the alien beings come from Saturn?"

"I can't say the matter is certain," said Avalon. "She may, after all, suppose them to have come from some entirely fictitious planet such as Zorkel, the fifth planet of the star, Xanadu, in the galaxy of Yaanek. If, however, she has a real astronomical body in mind, then I am virtually certain it is Saturn. It must be."

"It sounds good to me," said Gonzalo.

"It makes sense," admitted Rubin, looking distressed at having to say so.

Halsted said, "It's worth a try."

Trumbull said, "I can't think of anything better."

Drake said, "It seems unanimous. I'd take the chance, Jonathan."

Dandle began, "Well, since I can't think of anything better, either—"

Gonzalo interrupted. "Wait. Henry hasn't said anything. Henry, what do you think?"

Dandle looked up in astonishment.

When Henry said, "May I ask Mr. Dandle if he shared in his sister's enthusiasm for Poe?" Dandle looked more astonished still.

Drake said, "Please answer, Jonathan. Henry is one of us."

Jonathan said, "No, definitely not. I know *The Raven*—no one can avoid knowing that. But I know nothing else. I stay away from him."

"In that case," said Henry, "I fear that Mr. Avalon's suggestion, although most ingenious, is not the correct answer."

Avalon looked offended. "Indeed, Henry? Have you anything better to offer?"

Henry said, "Consider, sir, that Miss Dandle was a great devotee of Poe, and that in describing the aliens she said they were neither female nor male, animal nor human."

"Well?"

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"Well, Mr. Avalon, I, unlike Mr. Dandle but like his sister, am an admirer or Poe, though more so of his poetry than of his prose. Among my favorite poems by Poe is *The Bells*—in the fourth part of which he describes the tolling of the funeral bells. There you have his morbid preoccupation with death, you see, something that is bound to follow his earlier descriptions of sleigh bells, wedding bells, and fire-alarm bells."

"Aha," said Rubin.

"Yes, Mr. Rubin," said Henry, "I suspect you already see what I mean. Part of the description of the funeral bells is—if I may quote:

" 'And the people—ah, the people—
They that dwell up in the steeple,
All alone,
And who, tolling, tolling, tolling,
In that muffled monotone,
Feel a glory in so rolling
On the human heart a stone—
They are neither man nor woman—
They are neither brute nor human—' "

Henry paused, then said, "Miss Dandle was quoting those last two lines, I think. You stated that she said them in sing-song fashion, Mr. Dandle. But not being a Poe enthusiast, you did not recognize them."

Avalon said, "But even so— How does that help?"

Henry said, "It is the next line that counts, as Poe identifies the people who toll the funeral bells."

And he and Rubin quoted simultaneously: *" 'They are Ghouls.' "*

Henry said, "Ghouls are creatures of Middle Eastern legend who infest graveyards and feed on dead bodies. That might well strike Miss Dandle, or anyone, as worse than ordinary cannibalism, just as vultures are worse than hawks in the general estimation."

Avalon said, "I grant that, but I still don't see the point."

"Nor I," said Trumbull.

Henry said, "There is a constellation in the sky named Perseus, named for the Greek hero who cut off the head of Medusa, a creature so dreadful in appearance that anyone looking at it turned to stone. The constellation is pictured as the hero holding the head of Medusa and that head is marked by a second-magnitude star, Beta Persei. I looked it up in the *Columbia Encyclopedia* during the discussion, to be sure.

"Because of its position in the constellation, Beta Persei is some-

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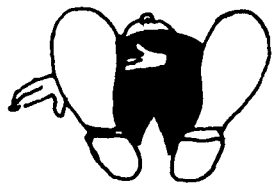
times called the Demon Star. The Arabs, who adopted the Greek view of the sky, named it 'Al Ghul,' meaning 'The Ghoul,' their version of something as horrible as Medusa. Our English version of that Arabic name is 'Algol' and that is now the common name of the star.

"Since Miss Dandle quoted that poem to define the aliens, she meant that they were ghouls, and therefore worse than cannibals, and she must have meant it was not surprising that they were since they came from the star known as 'The Ghoul.' I would suggest, Mr. Dandle, that when you see your sister tomorrow, you say that the aliens come from Algol."

Dandle smiled brightly for the first time that evening. "Henry, I will. That *should* be the answer—I'm sure it is."

Henry said, gravely, "Nothing may be completely sure in this case, sir, but it is worth the gamble."



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a *NEW* short story by

CLEMENTS JORDAN

"Momma, is Lilibet going to get married?" Mandy was near crying. She had been listening behind the stairs door, not wanting to see her aunt, who was always flinging Lilibet's beaus in Mandy's face and making out she was so sorry for her.

"No, no," Mat told her. "You know how your Aunt Lilie talks. To hear her tell it, Lilibet could marry President Roosevelt tomorrow . . ."

Clements Jordan's thirteenth story in the pages of EQMM since her memorable debut in the Department of First Stories in December 1979 with "Mr. Sweeney's Day" . . .

THE MATCHMAKERS

by CLEMENTS JORDAN

Nobody figured Vern Bodine for a killer. Won't nobody deny he was a drinking man. But every week long it was "Yessir" and "Nosir" and "Sure thing." It was come home so tired his head nodded in his supper plate and not a wrong word to chick or child. Who could hold it against a man if he stepped off of a Friday and swapped a bit of his pay for a jug of something to take out the taste of a week's swallowed bile? Had it coming, you could say.

Friday nights was lively. He began to speak forceful at the table on many subjects—government (going to the dogs), politics (crooked), finances (terrible and getting worse), morals (different from what they was and dead wrong), young'uns (a sin and a shame). What he said had truth to it and he often spoke himself into a good humor. All his folks had to do was hear him out. Naturally he took exception if they started arguing against his principles and if anybody got up

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and left the table while he was speaking. Worse of all, it riled him if he caught a young'un rolling his eyes and showing disrespect.

Sometimes he started a song or two. Properly humored, he mellowed down and said when they'd go to bed. And that's when, Mat Bodine told her sister-in-law, she had to watch out for herself. Eight kids was God's plenty. She was a mite old, of course, but it never paid to be too sure.

Saturday was the day *everybody* had to watch out. Vern felt plumb mean next morning and reached for his jar before he opened his eyes. Of course, back in their young days, Mat tried pouring it out, but that only made him buy more and give her a black eye as well. Believe it or not, he'd manage off and on to drink the whole entire jug by night. That's when the kids did well to be out and gone, for then Vern got ugly mean. There was no saying different. But if everybody just kept quiet and stayed out of the way, he'd be his good sober self by Sunday night, for Vern never drank on the Sabbath or missed work on Monday. There wasn't nobody on earth a man'd rather hunt or fish with or sit with for a sociable spell than Vern Bodine.

Vern was known to lay a hand on Mat or the kids now and again, and a few times him and his brother Homer next door mixed it up some. But this was in the family and natural. What everybody found hard to take in was why Vern Bodine shot and killed his own foreman when Vern was just a few years from retirement and pension. Only Mat knew for sure. Lilie might have some idea, but she couldn't prove nothing.

Seems Mat and Lilie just had to rival one another. Married to brothers in the same job, living next door, both having a slew of kids—well, they was just bound to compare things. The men drew about the same money and both their houses was furnished them by the railroad, but Homer wasn't a drinking man like Vern and maybe Lilie had a few things nicer than Mat—nothing that Mat begrudged her, though.

Every time they talked, Lilie would drag in something she'd bought. She was partial to that coffee that gave coupons, she said, and was saving up to get that breast pin with rubies. She knew Mat got the cheapest-price coffee because Vern didn't give her as much house money as Homer gave Lilie. Then Mat would brag about Vern, Jr.'s report card—nothing lower than a "C," he was bound to be promoted to the sixth grade—and Lilie would have to quiet down. Her kids wasn't scholars.

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They was about even there. No, the thing that each wanted beyond all was a husband for her middle child. Each woman had three older children married and gone, but Mat's three was boys and Lilie's was girls so there hadn't been no crossways feelings. But their fourth children were both daughters, born only months apart. "Oh, God," Mat prayed, "don't let that Lilibet get married first."

Lilibet, mind you! Mat disbelieved in fancy names. Showed people was uppity. She named her girl Mandy after her grandma, and she might not be fancy and curly-headed like Lilibet, but she was a good Christian girl and handy about the house as a pocket in an apron. For a year now she'd been hemming pillowslips and sheets and putting them in a box under her bed. Nobody had to be ashamed of Mat Bodine's girl's marriage chest.

It was Monday morning again. Vern, perfectly sober, had got off to work. Mat had washed the breakfast dishes and seen the young'uns off to school. She'd sent Mandy upstairs to spread up the beds and was fixing to have a cup of coffee when there was a knock on the kitchen door. "Come on in," she called.

"Can't. Got my hands full."

What*ever?*

Mat went over and opened the door, and there stood Lilie, her arms loaded with yard goods.

Mat was dumb foundered. Never had she seen such a sight outside a store. Lilie must of gone clear to town to get all that.

"I just wanted you to see all the yard goods I got to sew up for Lilibet," Lilie said, wiping an imaginary crumb off the table (the nerve!) before laying out the different pieces. "This blue flowered, the pink, the red dot—" she went on for all the world like Mat didn't have good eyesight "—another blue—and this stripe's so handsome, I thought I'd make a long-sleeve dress and one of them new sun-back dresses the girls is all wearing now. Though I say it as shouldn't, Lilibet looks good in every color." She ran her hand over the bolt of fabric to show off how silky it was.

"Here, have a cup of coffee," said Mat, who could taste hers coming up in her throat. "If you can stand poor folks' coffee. Take some sugar."

Lilie drew up a chair and graciously accepted coffee and sugar. "I thought you'd be interested in case you ever have to make Mandy some setting-out dresses."

The old spite cat!

"That might be before you know it." Mat crossed her fingers.

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"That so? Who's courting her? I ain't seen no one over this house." Lilie plain suspicioned a lie.

"You don't see everybody comes down the pike," Mat said with dignity, "any more than I see everybody that calls on you. I've got my work to do instead of watching other folks. —I reckon you can say the same," she added to make up. Lilie had commenced to frown.

"I should say I have! Besides all this sewing! 'Course that special dress will be white silk, I reckon—if that girl of mine can just make up her mind. I vow, it makes me feel young again. All them boys coming and going. Momma used to say she felt like sweeeping 'em out with a broom in my day. Now I know how she felt." She smoothed a lock of hair behind her ear and simpered.

"Well, we've both come a good piece down the road since them days," Mat said flat out and thought how Lilie's looks hadn't worn no better than hers. Nobody could tell that hair had been yeller. "Mandy is just as serious and choicy as you'd want to see."

"I always say it don't pay to be *too* choicy. Right now when a girl's young, it's 'Who do I want?' Before she knows it, it's 'Who can I get?' "

"I reckon there's some truth to that. Still, the girls isn't sixteen yet."

"Soon will be. Mandy's older than Lilibet. Plenty old to be engaged and have shower parties. Lord, I remember the parties I had—all kinds of dishes and a quilting bee. 'Course, that's old-fashioned now. Lilibet wants blankets. I'm going to save up for them next."

Mat's heart fainted. Lilie was way ahead of her. She knew well enough how many boys hung around next door, and only one, Elmore Hickson, came waiting on Mandy. He was bashful and homely—nice enough in a doleful way, but a poor stick when it came to courting. Mandy never thought two pins about him. Every Saturday night he just came and sat, nothing to say for hisself. Often as not, Mandy'd get up and go to bed before he left. Lilie was right. Time went by at a clip. A girl got over being young almighty quick.

Lilie put her spoon in her cup, fixing to leave, got up to stack up her goods, and put her arms around the lot. "I'll tell you first when Lilibet decides and you'll get to help sew for the bride," she promised kindly. "And you just tell Mandy she's welcome to come over and see Lilibet's things anytime."

She sidled to the door, making a show of leaning down to turn the knob. Mat stayed put. Let her drop the whole shebang, for all she

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cared. Lilie eased out, closing the door with her foot. Mat banged her spoon on the table and felt some better.

"Momma, is Lilibet going to get married?" Mandy was near crying. She had been listening behind the stairs door, not wanting to see her aunt, who was always flinging Lilibet's beaus in Mandy's face and making out she was so sorry for her. Like mother, like daughter, so Mandy didn't hang around Lilibet none either. Poor child, Mat thought. She ate good and was out in the air all the time. How come she didn't have none of that handsome pink color in *her* face? She had to sleep in rag curlers every night, too. Things wasn't fair in this old world.

"No, no. You know how your Aunt Lilie talks. To hear her tell it, Lilibet could marry President Roosevelt tomorrow. She come over wagging a whole sight of piece goods to make dresses for Lilibet. Bet they'll all be out of style before Miss Madam makes up her mind."

Mandy smiled wanly. "Momma, Lilibet *could* get married tomorrow. All she'd have to do is crook her little finger. Herbert Jamison, Dick Freeman, Nelson Tucker—they'd all just jump at her. And Uncle Homer don't drink neither. He's nice and polite—"

"Now you just hush that talk. Ain't a better man ever lived than your pa, working and slaving for y'all—and you mean-mouthing him."

"Well, if it had been anybody but Elmore here Saturday night when Pa got to talking about loose women, I'd been rightly shamed."

Mandy was telling the truth. Vern had gone on about modren girls going around near naked, showing their limbs and painting their faces. He claimed they led fellows on and nobody ought to be a lick surprised at what followed. Elmore's eyes had got right big. Mandy had turned red and gone upstairs.

Mat was silent for a spell. "Elmore ain't such a bad-looking boy. A little meat on his bones and a nice, good suit of clothes—"

"Momma, he's dumb as a fence post. Fall over his own feet if you say 'Howdy' to him. He's last of pea-picking."

"The right girl could make something out of him." Mat faced Mandy, eye to eye, and spoke positive. "Elmore is better than nothing."

Mandy stared back at her. Her eyes sparked up, died down. She opened and shut her mouth a few times. Then she dropped her eyelids and said real low, "Yes, Ma'am." Then, "Elmore won't never speak up, Momma."

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"We'll just have to see," Mat said.

But she couldn't "see" until she took it to the Lord on her knees.

That night when Vern was asleep, she slipped out of bed and knelt down and asked Him to show her the way. And He did—the very next day.

She took herself down to store and bought striped dress goods—orange, yeller, and brown (something that'd show up good)—and that new fangled sun-dress pattern. She'd pieced out nickels and pennies and bought Love's Dream lipstick.

But after all her trouble, Mandy balked at wearing the dress. "Lord, Momma, Pa will *kill* me! You *know* it!"

"Now, young lady, suppose you just help me along a little. I've had to think of everything till I'm most sick. I used all the house money to fix you up, till I got nothing to put on the table but jar food, and here you are acting ungrateful."

"Yes'm," Mandy swallowed.

"Now, listen. I'm asking Elmore over special for Saturday night supper. You dress up and sit by him. You don't have to say a word. Just sort of look up at him a few times. Pay no attention to your pa. Let me handle things till he gets the idea Elmore is courting. Pretty soon I'll say, 'Whyn't you two go on out on the porch and set in the swing?' Don't answer me back. Just go on out there. If Elmore don't get up, grab him by the hand. That ain't nothing these days. Then I'll say to your pa that y'all're out there alone and he ought to go out and ask Elmore his intentions. I bet that brings Elmore to the point. Now don't put a foot wrong, girl, if you want to set with your feet under your own table."

But then, after all her work and trouble and expense, things looked doomed. Vern come home Friday worried as a hen setting on a nest full of doorknobs. Seemed like the railroad was going on strike. All Friday night he was beside himself. He walked the floor and drank out the jug. Nobody got to bed.

Saturday Vern turned over a new leaf—a bad one. He went out and bought another jug. Mat, running her hand down under the flour, didn't find but three dollars and a little change left to run the house on. She sent the little ones around to their older brothers' houses with orders not to come home till tomorrow afternoon. When Vern went into the bedroom and stayed all day, Mat began to breathe easier. Things still might work out.

Elmore showed up in a clean shirt and necktie and almost looked

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her in the face as he muttered, "How're you?" Mandy wore the dress, but her mouth looked smeared. She had lost her nerve and wiped off the lipstick. Sternly, Mat got her aside, held her chin, and put it back on herself. "Now," she said, "go call your pa to supper."

Right away Mat saw this to be a mistake. Vern was red-eyed and sulling. He sat at his place, staring into his plate without lifting knife or fork. Mat wet her lips and said Elmore looked mighty nice, didn't he? Vern made no answer. Mandy tasted no morsel but kind of dragged her fork across her food. Mat poured coffee and said for everyone to drink up while it was hot. Elmore ate some of everything, passed his cup for more coffee, and said, "It's sure good, Miz Bodine." Mat said Mandy sure looked good in her new dress and Elmore looked nice too, didn't they, Vern?

Holding onto the table, Vern suddenly heaved hisself up. "To hell with the whole stinking mess!" he shouted. "What're things coming to when a man works his tail off and has nothing to show for it?" He threw his plate of food across the room into the sink. He slapped his cup of coffee off the table.

"Why don't you two go on out on the porch?" Mat said.

As Mandy and Elmore escaped, Vern sank back down at the table and propped his head on his hand, gazing way off yonder. Lord, Mat hated to rouse him up, but she just couldn't bide another week like this last one. She'd never get Mandy set up right again. Suppose tonight scared Elmore off?

"Vern." She poked his arm. "Vern? Elmore's been coming over here pretty regular. Recken you got something to ask him?"

Vern turned his head. "What?"

"Oughtn't you ask Elmore what he intends by Mandy?"

Vern's eyes focused on her. "What do you mean?"

"Well, you know Mandy's getting to an age when you got to be careful she ain't took advantage of, wearing modren clothes and face paint. She and Elmore are out there in the swing and it's getting dark."

Vern shook his head slowly and leaped out the chair like a spring in a wore-out bed tick. Mat's knees turned to jelly and her throat locked so she couldn't speak when he grabbed the gun down off the wall and run out, banging away. That's when Mr. Shaner come walking through the gate. He'd been dropping in all down the row to tell the men there wasn't going to be no strike.

Of course, it was plain to everybody it was nothing but manslaughter, which was to say an accident. Vern was just aiming to

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shoot a varmint that had been messing with his chickens and was running out to the yard after it when Mr. Shaner ran smack dab into the bullet. Still, they had to give Vern a year in the pen. Mat and the four youngest would have to scatter round amongst the three eldest boys till Vern got out and went to providing again.

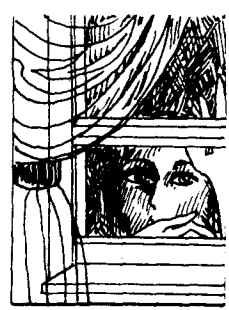
But there was a happy side to the story. Mandy was scared when the gun went off and went to screaming and crying and hugging Elmore's neck. And Elmore come through and said he was going to stand by Mandy in her affliction.

Her pa's trouble was plenty excuse for the wedding to be simple, as everybody understood. Mandy had a right nice white dress. It wasn't silk, but it wasn't the kind of dress anybody'd slip on to run the hog out the garden. All her sister-in-laws pitched in and bought it, and shoes to match. Elmore looked nice, too, in a white shirt and new tie.

Mandy didn't get to have but one shower party—a funny kind she read about in a magazine. A linjeree shower, they called it. Turned out to be flimsy underwear. But Lord, all girls had their notions when they was young, before marriage steadied them down.

But the best part was when Mat could say to Lilie, "Don't recken it'll be too mighty long before Lilibet catches a husband. Tell her to stand real close by the steps and Mandy will throw her the bowkay so she'll get lucky."

Mat almost laughed right there in church at the look on Lilie and Lilibet's faces. Both of them looked for all the world like they'd bit down on green persimmons.



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a *NEW* Simon Bognor story by

TIM HEALD

If by any chance Simon Bognor of the British Board of Trade and his wife Monica are new to you, you have a delightful experience immediately in store—and some happy catching up to do . . .

SIMON BOGNOR AND THE APOCRYPHA TIE

by TIM HEALD

The coincidences were bizarre, but Bognor was obstinately convinced that the arm of coincidence was far longer than that of the law. Besides, he was that sort of person, and Santa Fe was that sort of place.

True, he had been disbelieving when Parkinson first suggested the idea.

"How would you fancy New Mexico, Bognor?" his boss had inquired flintily as he chewed his pencil under the ever watchful but fast-fading gaze of her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Second, framed in walnut and resplendent in coronation robes.

"*New* Mexico?" asked Bognor, playing for time.

"Your ears did not deceive you, Bognor," rasped Parkinson, threatening to bite the pencil in half. "It's one of the United States. Or," he added, sotto voce, "so they say."

"I've been to Mexico," said Bognor, "that amazing food-and-drink fest in Acapulco when we were investigating the Bitschwiller Champagne case. But I didn't know there was a new one."

Parkinson wasn't listening. He tried to avoid listening to Bognor whenever possible. Bad for his blood-pressure.

"The point is," said Parkinson, "that our American cousins are cu-

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riously enthusiastic about 'exchange schemes.' " He waved a piece of paper in Bognor's direction. "It appears that for reasons best known to themselves, they feel that a certain Lieutenant Jerry Tafoya of the New Mexican State Police would benefit from a month or two in our company here in London. In return for which they would enjoy showing one of our chaps some New Mexican ropes." Parkinson stared at his subordinate very hard. "Frankly, Bognor, you're the only man I can spare."

It had turned out to be a wonderful "freebie." The funding came from a quasi-official organization named the International Foundation for the Furtherance of Crime Control and was sufficiently lavish to enable Monica—Mrs. Bognor—to come along for the ride. The couple had managed to find a small but chic adobe residence within walking distance of Santa Fe's small but chic plaza, and Bognor appeared to be entirely free to do as he pleased. Occasionally he went riding with the New Mexico highway patrol or attended briefings on marijuana or illegal immigration over the Mexican border, but most often he and Monica sat in the sun drinking margaritas and eating bowls of green chili and beans. They both grew increasingly large and somnolent. Bognor bought himself a straw cowboy hat with a gaudy feather, the better to blend in with the surroundings. Also a new pair of jeans and a turquoise-and-silver bolo, which he wore instead of his Apocrypha College tie when feeling particularly reckless and devil-may-care.

It was Apocrypha, that most exotic of all Oxford colleges, which provided the coincidence.

For years, Santa Fe, like the artistic colony of Taos farther north, had attracted a certain sort of eccentric Englishman, and for years Apocrypha had been providing them. Other Oxford colleges specialized in worldly success or aristocracy, but Apocrypha majored in oddity. It should therefore have come as no surprise when, walking along the plaza of the Governor's Palace one morning, what should Bognor espy but a man in the distinctive purple-and-pink striped tie of the Arkwright and Blennerhasset Society, Apocrypha's famous debating club. The man was eating a Häagen-Dazs ice-cream cone. Chocolate chip.

Bognor turned away swiftly and pretended to be scrutinizing an array of Indian jewelry laid out for sale on a blanket at his feet.

"Don't look now," he muttered out of the side of his mouth, "but I think I've seen Len Badman."

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"Don't be silly, darling." Monica was examining a very beautiful heavy silver necklace.

"How much?" she asked the dealer.

"Five hundred dollars."

Monica made a face.

"I swear it is," said Bognor. "He's wearing an A and B tie."

"Darling, Len Badman's First Secretary at the Embassy in Ulan Bator. It was in this year's college record." She glanced suspiciously at her husband. "Have you been at the tequila?"

"Of course not." Bognor squinted over his shoulder. "Oh, God!" he said. "He's coming this way. And judging from his outsize leer, he must have seen us, too." He looked around frantically, but there was no escape. Already they could hear Badman's upper-class English voice raised against the dominant North American hum.

"I say! I say! I say!" he seemed to be saying, and then as he came close it was, "Good grief! Simon! Monica! Long time, no see!"

Reluctantly, the Bognors turned to greet their old university chum. Not chum, of course, not really. Badman had thought of himself as a great mucker of Simon's. They had been to tutorials together. Badman had taken money off Bognor at both poker and bridge. Bognor had proposed and Badman seconded the Arkwright and Blennerhasset motion that "when the last trump is sounded this house will follow suit." But the friendship had been entirely one-sided. Bognor could not stand the sight of Len Badman. He had never let on, because to do so would have been more trouble than it was worth. Besides, Bognor never enjoyed giving offense, even to someone like Len Badman.

And so it was now. Bognor pumped Badman's hand with every show of enthusiasm, returned his grin, and agreed that it had indeed been long time no see and that this was an extraordinary coincidence. Only privately did he observe that the years had been no kinder to Badman than to himself. Badman was sallow-complexioned and stooping, his teeth seemed unnaturally yellow, and his lank hair grey and sparse—and he still had that particular smarminess which had so offended Bognor in the past.

In response to Badman's question, Bognor told his fellow alumnus what had brought him to Santa Fe and then asked the same of him. They had parked themselves on one of the plaza's wrought-iron benches just by the war memorial obelisk with its charmingly misspelled inscription.

"Aunt Agatha finally toppled off the perch," said Badman. He

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smiled and brought out a cigarette. Bognor and Mrs. Bognor waited for him to continue. But Badman seemed to think Aunt Agatha's demise was explanation itself.

"I'm not sure I see the connection, Len," complained Monica at last.

Badman looked at her as if she were simple.

"Uncle Geoffrey was loaded," he said. "Bathroom fittings mostly. He was the first man to bring bidets to Britain. No offspring, though. So I was Aunt Agatha's nearest and dearest. Which meant that when she popped off I got every last bean. There were times when I was afraid the lucre would go to Battersea Dogs' Home, but I'm glad to say that kith and kin prevailed."

Badman sat back and smiled some more.

"Such charm!" He waved his cigarette in the direction of the Indian jewelry vendors on the side of the road. "Don't you think?"

Bognor said, "Yes, but I still don't see why Agatha's legacy brought you here of all places."

"What better place for a writer and artist to come?"

"But you're in the Foreign Office!"

"Tush pish!" said Badman, shrugging indulgently. "Not any more."

"What exactly are you writing?" asked Bognor skeptically.

"And painting?" inquired Monica, not sounding altogether convinced herself.

"Oh this and that." Badman gave the impression that it would be futile, even demeaning, for a creative person such as himself to discuss work-in-progress with philistines like Simon and Monica. They would simply not understand. Nevertheless, they pressed on and repeated the question, and Badman, pinkening slightly, said that he was planning a novella and working on a major series of canvasses inspired by such popular New Mexican miracles as the holy tortilla, which was reputed to have the Face of Christ imprinted on it.

"You may laugh," he said crossly as the Bognors giggled. "They laughed at the Wright brothers. They laughed at Picasso. There are always mockers and scoffers. But I would have expected you two to have a little more intelligence."

He seemed hurt, so Bognor apologized.

"The funny thing," said Badman, apparently mollified, "is that you're the third Apocrypha man to show up in town. Would you

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believe it? Three Apocrypha graduates in a New Mexican town of fifty thousand! It must be some sort of record."

"Who's the other one?" Bognor was apprehensive. He hadn't come six thousand miles from the Board of Trade Special Investigations Department in order to take part in some form of old boys' reunion. Indeed, the nearest he had come to social intercourse with anyone apart from Monica was a drinking session with the sheriff and a party of policemen in the Green Onion Bar one evening. He preferred it that way. He didn't particularly mind bumping into his Oxford contemporaries in Whitehall or St. James', but in Santa Fe it was a bit thick.

"It's Mortlake, as a matter of fact." It was Badman's turn to look skeptically at Bognor. "I'm surprised you hadn't heard. He's rather a celebrity hereabouts. It doesn't do to say it out loud, but the fact is that Americans are even keener on titles than we are. Old Mortlake's out to dinner every night of the week. On all sorts of committees, fund-raising for heaven knows what. He's captaining the British croquet team tomorrow."

"Hang on a second—" Bognor eyed a lissome girl in brief shorts and a shirt which said *Short People Don't Need Shrinks* across her bust—she was actually quite tall and was talking Texan to a bearded man in a bandana and blue-denim "—you don't mean that oaf, Henry Mortlake? *Lord* Mortlake? The chap who took a pass degree in geography and was almost sent down when they found him nude in the front quad at three in the morning."

"The same," said Badman. "At least I assume it is. I haven't actually clapped eyes on him yet. I spoke to him on the phone yesterday. Volunteered for the croquet team. I don't know if you remember, but if I say it myself I was a pretty dab hand with a mallet."

Bognor said, "Oh."

"Tell you what," said Badman with a flush of enthusiasm. "You and Monica ought to put in an appearance. I seem to remember you were a pretty dab hand, too, Monica. Between us, we should be able to make up for Simon's shortcomings, don't you think? Eh?"

Simon and Monica said they would think about it.

It was Officer Apodaca who told them next morning that Len Badman had been shot. The neighbors had heard gunshots and found the wretched Badman in bed, extremely dead.

"Dead?" Monica was intrigued rather than surprised when Simon

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told her. "He wasn't looking at all well, but then looking well was never really Badman's bag."

"No," said Bognor, "evidently he was shot."

"Shot?"

"Yes," said Bognor irritably. "With a gun."

"Good Lord." Monica seemed much more shocked by the manner of Badman's death than by the death itself. "Who would have done a thing like that?"

"Your guess is as good as mine. The police seem to think it was something to do with sex. He didn't have any clothes on."

"Oh, *really.*" It was Monica's turn to be irritable. "He probably slept in the nude. Lots of people do."

She herself never wore clothes in bed, unlike her spouse who always affected striped flannelette pajamas, even in the un-air-conditioned heat of a New Mexican summer.

"Speak for yourself," muttered Bognor huffily. "It would never have happened if these people were more sensible about guns. In Britain if there's a lovers' tiff, the worst that happens is that someone gets a black eye or a bloody nose. Here you end up in the morgue."

"If we were American, we'd have shot each other years ago."

"My point precisely." Bognor gazed at the gold-and-scarlet Santa Fe rose outside the window in the tiny walled garden. "The question is, should we still go to the croquet?"

"The game must go on," said Monica in a mock jolly-hockey-sticks manner. "Isn't that what Badman would have said?"

"Doubt it," said Bognor. "He wasn't much given to fair play and stiff upper lip. I, however, feel we should keep the flag flying and take in the croquet." He considered. "Besides, I'd like to take a gander at Mortlake."

It was esprit de corps, the solidarity of the old-boy network, as much as a sense of his duty as an official of the British Board of Trade which led to Bognor putting in a brief appearance at the scene of the crime and the morgue. He went as an Apocrypha man rather than an investigator. The college would have expected it.

"Any clues?" he inquired of Officer Apodaca after gazing thoughtfully on Badman's shrouded corpse.

Officer Apodaca shrugged. A healthy heterosexual, he was frankly uninterested in crime among the left-handed. Deviants, to his way of thinking, put themselves beyond the law and got what they de-

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served. If God had intended men to play with each other he would never have created women.

"We found this," he said, handing Bognor a small white-cardboard box. Bognor opened the box and found himself staring at a single cufflink, striped in purple and pink.

"Just the one?"

"Yes," said Officer Apodaca, bored.

"I see," said Bognor.

Later, at the dead man's apartment, he spent a quarter of an hour going through Badman's bedroom. He paid little attention to the diary nor to the letters carefully tied with pink ribbon in the bottom left-hand drawer of the dressing table. He did, however, pause to consider the jewelry. New Mexico was a good place for male jewelry, one of the few parts of the industrialized west where a man could wear blue and silver rings and jeweled watchstraps without having his masculinity called into question. In his brief stay in New Mexico, Badman had acquired a prodigious amount of locally crafted jewelry, but that was not what Bognor was looking for. It was the jewelry Badman had brought with him.

Bognor finally found it in among a gaudy array of local stuff. Pink-and-purple cufflinks. A pair.

"Hmm," said Bognor, his brain trying desperately to break out of a jog.

Bognor wore white-flannel trousers to the croquet. They had once belonged to his grandfather, a keen amateur cricketer, so "white" was a euphemism. They were actually a bleached custard color with green about the knees where grandfather Bognor had sprawled headlong in the grass while fielding. Monica had packed them because she thought they were the sort of thing a British government official should wear in New Mexico. She would have packed a pith helmet if she could have found one.

"I feel idiotic," said Bognor as he swung the hired Plymouth into the driveway of the two-story mud-brown house where the croquet was to take place.

"Don't be silly, darling," said Monica, "you look very nice."

"I can't get the top button on the trousers done up."

"It doesn't show with the belt." Monica herself was wearing blue-jeans and a T-shirt from Bognor Regis. Her idea of a joke.

Bognor parked between a Rolls Corniche and a canary-colored

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Porsche. All the cars were either luxury numbers like that or Jeeps or pickups festooned with gadgets. All except the Bognors' Plymouth.

The front door of the house was open and in the distance they could hear a drone of chat, presumably from the croquet lawn. They went on in through cool rooms rich with R. C. Gorman and James Harrill paintings, some Hauser sculptures, and Navajo rugs.

"Money," said Bognor wistfully.

Monica nodded. "At least they know how to spend it," she said.

They paused at the open French windows. About twenty or thirty people were standing on the patio, drinking. Seeing them, a bulky, grey-haired man detached himself from a small conversation and said, "Hi, Fred Simmonds."

Bognor and Monica, who had learned the basics of American etiquette, said, "Hi, Simon Bognor," and "Hi, Monica Bognor," and they all shook hands.

Mr. Simmonds asked the Bognors what part of England they were from, and then, eying Bognor's neckwear, remarked that it was a very fancy tie and the same colors as Lord Mortlake's tie—he was unfamiliar with the sartorial semantics of traditional Britain but was he correct in inferring that Simon had been at the same college as Lord Mortlake?

Bognor—rather gravely—said, "Yes," and Mr. Simmonds said that that was a very extraordinary coincidence. A waiter in white jacket and black bowtie offered drinks from a tray and the Bognors selected margaritas, wincing pleasurably as their lips touched the salty rims. Mr. Simmonds said they'd probably like to meet Lord Mortlake, and the Bognors, concurring, allowed him to lead them to the gathering's farthest corner, where a short, stout figure was holding court in a braying British voice.

As they walked toward their captain, Mr. Simmonds was telling the Bognors what an asset Lord Mortlake was to the community. He had only been in town for six months and yet already he knew everybody, was on all the right committees, and was every hostess's favorite. "He's a regular ball of fire," said their host, adding self-deprecatingly that it wasn't often a blue-blooded British aristocrat surfaced in the remoteness of New Mexico, and that when all was said and done most Americans loved a Lord.

Bognor, who had had to smile stiffly through countless adulatory monologues about "your wonderful Queen Elizabeth, your divine Prince Charles, your adorable Lady Di," knew that this was indeed so. Henry Mortlake was obviously onto a good thing.

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"Henry!" cried Mr. Simmonds in a voice which managed to convey the feeling that he was truly privileged to be on Christian-name terms with so illustrious a figure, "Henry, we have some new recruits for your team! I'd like you to meet Simon Bognor and Monica Bognor!"

Henry Mortlake turned.

For an instant he seemed oddly discomposed—a fleeting jaw sag, a momentary frown—but then instant affability.

"How absolutely super," he said, shaking them both by the hand. "And unless I'm mistaken, we share a common alma mater. That *is* an Arkwright and Blennerhasset tie, isn't it?"

"Yes," said Bognor. "What an extraordinary coincidence."

"Absolutely extraordinary," Lord Mortlake beamed. "That makes three of us. Who would have believed it? He should be here by now."

"Who?" asked Bognor.

"Fellow called Badman," said Lord Mortlake. "He phoned. Some sort of paintbrush wallah, don't you know? Claimed to wield a passably deft croquet mallet."

"I'm afraid," said Bognor carefully, "Badman won't be able to make it. I saw him earlier. In the morgue. He was a bit dead."

"Dead?" Lord Mortlake was aghast. "He can't be. I spoke to him only the other day. He sounded top hole."

"Someone shot him," said Monica.

"Good grief." His Lordship took a stiffening snort of margarita. "Mind you this is a pretty lawless sort of a place—chaps getting shot all over the place, especially on Friday night after a touch too much tequila—but that's dreadful news. An A and B man getting shot! How did you find out?"

"I'm with the police," said Bognor, "in a manner of speaking."

Lord Mortlake took another rather large draft of alcohol. "Are you indeed? That's fascinating. Not many of my Apocrypha chums joined the boys in blue. By the way, when were you up?"

" 'Sixty-two to 'sixty-five," said Bognor.

"Just after my time." Mortlake spoke hurriedly. "I left in 'sixty-one. Straight into the regiment. Invalided out. Game leg."

"I'm sorry to hear that," said Bognor. "What was your subject?"

"History," said Lord Mortlake. "Modern History."

"Ah," said Bognor, "same here. I saw that poor Professor Apthorpe kicked the bucket the other day. Got the lead obit in the *Times*. So that only leaves old Phipps. Remember Phipps?"

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"Do I remember Phipps?" Lord Mortlake laughed a trifle uneasily. "I'll say I remember Phipps. You wouldn't forget Phipps in a hurry."

"Not that I liked that medieval Latin we had to do with him," said Bognor. "Bishop Stubbs' select charters. Bede. Yuk."

"Oh, I don't know," said Lord Mortlake. "I was quite partial to a bit of Latin actually."

Their reminiscences were interrupted by their host, Mr. Simmonds, who appeared to be chief umpire as well. It was time for the game to start.

Of all games, croquet is the most hypocritical. Superficially, it reeks of gentility, but in reality it is the most ill-tempered and crooked of all. The root of the problem, in Bognor's estimation, was the rule which allowed your opponent to "croquet" you—which meant that he was allowed on occasion to hit your ball as far as possible from the field of play. At home in England, Bognor had spent many miserable hours attempting to extricate his ball from clumps of nettles or thick, thorny rose bushes while other players called out, with scarcely concealed derision, "Bad luck, old boy!" or "Hard cheese, Simon!" or, worst of all, "I hate to do it you, Bognor, old fruit, but rules are rules!" Monica seemed better able than he to enter into the mean spirit of the occasion, but he invariably seemed to be far from the hoops and the action. Whenever he did manage to hoick his ball back to the croquet equivalent of the fairway, some creep quickly consigned him to outer darkness once more.

It was much like this today. The grass was bumpy and the margaritas strong. Bognor's eye was not unerring and his stroke not sure. "Come on, Bognor, concentrate on the game!" called his captain more than once. But Bognor's mind was on other things.

A tie was the proper result and a tie it was. It was always, Bognor discovered over a final post-game margarita, a tie. That way no one was offended and there was no problem in agreeing to a return fixture the following year. Bognor himself had suffered a resounding personal loss, which was by no means compensated for by Monica's almost equally resounding success.

"I say you two," said Lord Mortlake as the teams began to disperse, "what say you pop back to my place for a nightcap or something? I'd love to have a chinwag about the old days at the varsity and all that rot."

"Oh," said Bognor, just as Monica was about to invent an excuse, "that would be very agreeable. Thanks."

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"Good," said Lord Mortlake. "What fun."

It took very little time to say farewell to Mr. Simmonds and others and for Bognor to settle the hired Plymouth into the wake created by Lord Mortlake's silver Mercedes convertible, numberplate OHENRY.

"What's up?" asked Monica, who had not managed a private word with her husband all evening.

"The game," said Bognor, through gritted teeth, "that's what's up."

"He's certainly not the Lord Mortlake I remember."

"Course not." Bognor grinned. "He was no more at Apocrypha than I was at Alcatraz."

"Are you sure?"

"Never more certain of anything in my life." Bognor grinned meanly. "Do *you* remember Phipps?"

"I was going to ask about that." Monica winced as a twelve-year-old Hispanic child on a Harley Davidson cut in front of them. "You didn't have a medieval-history tutor called Phipps."

"Exactly."

"Your medieval-history teacher was Pendragon, the genealogist with the ginger beard."

"Precisely." Bognor scratched an ear in a moment of supreme self-satisfaction. "And who was Phipps?"

"The only Phipps I remember was the college cat."

"Right again. Our friend Lord Mortlake is under the illusion that Phipps taught him medieval Latin. He's a sham. A con man. He's no more Lord Mortlake than I'm Genghis Khan or you're Margaret Thatcher."

"I sometimes think I'd be rather good at Margaret Thatcher," said Monica quite huffily. "If I lacquered my hair and learned to talk with my head on one side."

"You wouldn't fool me," said Bognor, turning down a narrow alley after OHENRY, "any more than that common little swindler fooled me. The question is, is he just a poseur and an impostor, or something worse?"

They drew up outside a small condominium with a sign over the front door saying *La Paloma*.

"Here we are then," said Lord Mortlake, opening the passenger door for Monica with a chubby flourish. Even his blazer looked counterfeit. "Welcome to Casa Mortlake."

He led the way through a faintly dingy hallway up a flight of

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better-lit stairs to his own second-floor apartment. It was small without quite being pokey and boringly furnished without quite being drab. "A poor place but mine own," he said, ushering them in. "Off to a penthouse over the new bank building next month. Landed a useful number as a nonexecutive vice-president of Galactic-Española Oil. The title looks good on the jolly old notepaper. Now, Monica, what's your poison?"

Monica said she'd take a brandy if he had such a thing and Bognor said the same.

Mortlake disappeared for a minute and returned with three glasses and a half full bottle of Christian Brothers' best.

"Well," he said when they all had full glasses, "Chin-chin. And here's to jolly old Apocrypha and Oxford and all that."

It was Bognor who broke the pause that followed the toast. "By the way," he said, rummaging in his pocket, "the police found this outside Badman's apartment." He held up the distinctive pink-and-purple-striped cufflink.

"One of his cufflinks," said Lord Mortlake, a little too breezily. "He was an A and B man. He said."

"Well, it's not quite as simple as that." Bognor smiled, though not with much humor. "You see, Badman had a pair of A and B cufflinks in his studbox. Intact. Nothing missing. So this isn't his."

"Oh." Lord Mortlake scratched his head. "Nuts," he said. "I forgot the nuts." And he bustled out, shutting the door heavily behind him.

"You don't suppose he *is* Lord Mortlake," whispered Monica when he'd gone. "Suppose the Mortlake we remember died and this is some sort of cousin who's succeeded?"

"He's a total phony," Bognor whispered back. "Nonexecutive vice-president of Galactic-Española Oil. A con man. And, of course, as soon as Badman telephoned and said he was an old friend from Oxford, he knew the game was up. Which was why he shot him. It must have given him a nasty turn, having a second Apocrypha man materialize so suddenly."

They sat, silent and musing.

Presently a car started in the street below, the engine revved, tires squealed. Mr. and Mrs. Bognor looked at one another.

"Did he say 'nuts'?" asked Monica despairingly as her husband ran to the window, just in time to see the silver Mercedes rounding the corner at the end of the alleyway. And then she saw the first smudges of smoke curling blue under the door.

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"Eek! Simon!" she shrieked. "He's set us on fire! We're alight! Quick, do something!"

Bognor did the obvious. He crashed toward the door, opened it, recoiled before the blast of flame and fume, and shut it again.

"We can't get out that way, darling," he said. "And a closed door keeps out a fire for—how long? What do the textbooks say?"

"The textbooks are always wrong," said Monica, restored to reasonableness after her early hysterics. "We have to use the window."

It was one story up, but not a very high story. The ground below was a sort of dirty-red gravel-and-earth mixture, passably soft. It was jumpable. Bognor tried to throw the window open. He failed.

"Bloody window won't budge!" he shouted.

"Then break it!" Monica's reasonableness was on the ebb. The smoke was entering in ever more alarming quantities.

Bognor stared crossly at the window. The trouble was that not only was it unopenable but there was what appeared to be a fixed wire-mesh mosquito screen mounted on the outside. He started to cough. The drill under these circumstances was, he knew, to pee into a handkerchief and tie it over mouth and nose, but despite the thickening fumes the thought appalled him. He was a fastidious soul.

"Only one thing for it," he told Monica. "Stand back and follow me when I've gone."

Saying which, he paced back to the wall opposite the window, turned, and charged. There was a horrid crashing and splintering as he hit the screen, and it has to be admitted that Bognor emitted a loud noise which, though he claimed it was a virile "Banzai!" actually sounded rather alarmed. Monica, watching in astonishment and some distress, saw that he landed clumsily but managed to stagger to his feet. Or, more accurately, foot. The other was obviously sprained.

"Jump!" he called up, and she jumped, landing comfortably, just as she had been taught all those years ago in parachute training with the university Air Squadron.

One of Bognor's colleagues in the highway patrol picked up the silver Mercedes hightailing it for the Colorado state line north of Raton on I-25. The gun in "Lord Mortlake's" glove compartment matched the .38 bullet retrieved from Badman's body, and when later they went through the charred ruins of his apartment they found a single pink-and-purple cufflink. This, with Bognor's evi-

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dence, was enough to put his Lordship in the state penitentiary for many years.

"Sad case," said Bognor, celebrating its outcome over a mixed plate of tortillas, enchiladas, and other hot goodies at the Rancho de Chimayo. "If only he'd made up a name and title, he might have got away with it. It was so silly of him to pass himself off as a real person."

"Let alone—" Monica took a swig of sangria "—a graduate of Apocrypha."

Bognor ruminated. Then he said, "It was bad form, him shooting Len Badman, and he deserved to be put away for it. But do you know what really got my goat?" He spoke with surprising viciousness.

"Yes," said Monica, smiling. "The fact that he dared to wear an A and B tie to which he wasn't entitled."

Bognor smiled back at her. She was a plain old thing, but, he had to admit, she did understand him.

"Q"

DETECTIVERSE

SOMETHING FOR NOTHING

by WILLIAM F. SMITH

"Nothing ventured, nothing gained,"
Rang in the ex-con's ears.
He tried to rob a bank and failed,
But he gained twenty years.

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a *NEW* Baytown story by

WILLIAM BANKIER

Hagerty sounded rebellious, Claire observed.

"We have ways of dealing with rebels," Pierson said. His arm was around her waist.

"Like the Romans dealt with Spartacus?"

"No, we don't nail people up. We just take away some privileges."

"Devious." Claire frowned. "I prefer direct action . . ."

APPOINTMENT IN BAYTOWN

by WILLIAM BANKIER

She was called Harmless Harriet. The staff at the Coronet Hotel—maids, bellboys, beverage-room waiters—all knew she could destroy any of them in a fight. But they dubbed this massive woman "harmless" because the only damage she ever did was to people she bored senseless with her conversation.

Harriet handled a huge workload and she never missed a day, so the hotel kept her on. Most of her labors were performed on the ground floor—mopping, running the polisher, heaving tables to and fro. When mattresses needed shifting in the rooms upstairs, they sent for her.

"Grab the end of this, Harriet, and we'll give it a turn."

Sometimes, when they were short a chambermaid, Harriet took on the job of putting out fresh towels. With her passkey, she went from room to room, nattering away at any guests trapped inside. In the linen-room, the housekeeper expressed anxiety. "I'm surprised we don't get complaints."

"People don't mind. They know she's harmless."

"I suppose so. Harmless Harriet . . ."

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Mick Pierson couldn't see Cartierville from his sixteenth-floor office in downtown Montreal, but he lived as if Cartierville could see him. His years as a paddler with the famous boating club were far behind him, but Pierson, now in his forties, still wore his greying hair in a crewcut. He kept his weight down, and he walked the head-office corridors of Sherwood Milling at an athletic pace.

"Stand by for action," he said, striding past the desk where his secretary sat.

She gathered pad and pencil and followed the sales manager into what he called "the arboretum." Two walls were glass, and arranged in corners were potted palms and rubber plants which complemented the trees on Mount Royal half a mile away. "Clear my calendar for all of next week," Pierson said. "I have to go to Baytown and light a fire under Dave Hagerty."

As the secretary made notes, she felt sympathy for Hagerty. It sounded as if the regional manager was going to get burned.

Between issuing instructions, Pierson threw papers around on his desk. He couldn't believe these sales figures, evidence of how poorly Hagerty and his people were doing in marketing the range of Jessica Jarrow cakemixes. "Down a half a point in metro markets in the second quarter, despite the new Key Lime flavor plus increased advertising expenditures." Pierson shoved a file into a drawer and slammed it. "Lord love a duck, I'm going to have to teach Hagerty the facts of life."

As his secretary left the room, Pierson addressed her casually. "Did Miss Soublière return my call?"

"She did. It's among your messages."

He picked up his telephone and dialed Claire's extension.

"Claire Soublière . . . "

Her voice alone was enough to make the buzzing start inside Pierson's head.

"Are you by yourself?"

"Ah, it's you. Did you set it up?"

"Yes. Poor old Hagerty is going to have his knuckles rapped starting next week."

"And me?"

"I intend to punish you in a different way."

"You don't scare me."

"Nobody scares La Soublière. Have you confirmed your trip?"

"I'm even getting the company to pay for it," Claire said. "I compete in the powerboat races at Picton on Monday. On Wednesday,

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I attend a press conference in Toronto where I promote the new Jessica Jarrow flavors. In between—well, I understand I have an appointment in Baytown."

Later, when Pierson's secretary came in for his signature on the day's correspondence, she inquired, "Did you manage to catch Miss Soublière?"

"Yes, thank you." He felt he had to say more. "She's off again, racing. This company employs a home economist who's going to kill herself someday in a powerboat."

"No chance." The secretary's attitude was not sympathetic. "Have you ever watched her race? Kill somebody else, maybe."

Pierson knew his girl was right. He remembered viewing a race on television, Claire the only woman among seven competitors. She was unrecognizable—a helmeted, goggled, life-jacketed robot in the cockpit of a careening, buffeting hydroplane. On a crucial lap, one of the men tried to cut across her path in an attempt to steal the pylon position. Claire did not give way. She gunned her boat and deliberately steered wider than necessary, carrying the interloper so far up course that he sideswiped a marker boat as he turned, sank, and had to be rescued. She was reprimanded by race officials over that one. But the other competitors got the message; never take liberties with La Soublière.

Friday evening, six o'clock, Pierson was at his desk writing a memo in his neat hand. It was his custom to leave at least three of these documents on his secretary's desk for typing when she showed up on Monday morning. This was one of Mick Pierson's ploys for getting ahead in the business. He called it "filling the air with paper."

Really, it was so easy to succeed, he almost wanted to cry when he saw the way his colleagues neglected to do it. He almost wanted to run after them and take them aside and explain the error of their ways. Almost, but not quite. They behaved as if they would rather leave the office early, go to bars with friends, go to movies, go home and mow lawns or light fires or help their wives make supper—any waste of time instead of building a secure place inside the company.

"Mr. Pierson?"

Good—somebody to see him at it as the sun went down. "Come on in." He recognized the editor of the company magazine. "What can I do for you?"

"They tell me you're off to Baytown next week."

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"Too true."

The editor produced a camera. "This thing is loaded with fast black-and-white film. Flash is automatic. I wonder if you'd mind taking a few pictures of Mr. Hagerty and some of his people while you're there. I'm planning a feature on the Ontario sales force."

Pierson accepted the camera. It was a good one. "Glad to be of service," he said. "I'll supply the photos and you write your feature. If we're quick enough, we'll get it into the magazine while Mr. Hagerty is still employed by the company."

The ice in Bev Pierson's glass slid down and clattered against her teeth. It was a sound that angered her husband, perhaps infuriated him. She could only hope.

Bev sighed. As she heaved herself up from the settee, her knees cracked and an inch of ash fell from the cigarette between her lips. "Me for another." She walked to the sideboard and poured gin, conscious that one of her woolly slippers was turned under her foot and that Mick was probably looking at it. "Would you care—?"

"No, thank you." He was sitting in lamplight, dressed as always in shirt and tie and pressed slacks and shiny oxblood shoes with soles half an inch thick. His concession to Friday night was the slackening of the windsor knot in his boating-club tie. There were files on both arms of the chair, papers on his knee, and a pen in his hand. His briefcase yawned beside him.

Walking past her husband, Bev believed she could smell his aftershave, though it had been applied at eight o'clock that morning. Expensive stuff—a gift from somebody or other at the office. "More for me, then," she said, pitching her voice low. Like an actress in an extended run, she delivered the familiar lines with new inflections on different nights.

Beverly Binns, fifteen years ago, was the ideal girl for a paddler. Built like a handsome boy, she was active around the sheds, helping Mick sling his boat into the water. Afterwards, she lay collapsed on the grass in shorts and tank-top, looking like a miler after an attempt on the track record. Mick came by and lowered himself beside her, bringing his face to hers. She opened her eyes and saw him in a blur made spectacular by a corona of sunlight. He kissed her and she tasted salt.

There was an historic night when Bev Binns did something this generation of paddlers would talk about forever. They were in the clubhouse late of a Saturday, men only, drinking beer from quart

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bottles and trading obscene songs. "Sing us another one, just like the other one—" Bev showed up in her car to claim her fiancé. She found a ladder, raised herself to one of the open windows, stuck her curly head inside, and shocked them into silence by singing a verse none of them had heard before. "There once was a lady from Chichester—"

Now she was Beverly Pierson, her little boys were watching television upstairs, and she was on her fourth drink since supper, not counting the one before. "How long will you be gone?" she asked.

"Could be all week. The situation in southern Ontario is chaotic."

"It isn't any hell in Montreal west."

"Nothing a little self-discipline wouldn't cure."

A statement formed in Beverly's mind, but it was buried so deep she knew she could never drag it up and say it. It had to do with being lonely, it was a plea for help. She tipped her glass and the ice cubes fell against her teeth.

On Monday afternoon, Pierson arrived in Baytown and checked in at the Coronet Hotel. It was a sad hotel, he thought—he had stayed here before. The place put him in mind of a rundown convalescent home with the inmates in charge. The only good thing about his room this time was that it was in the back, his window overlooking the river, instead of in front with that infuriating townhall clock sounding the sleepless hours.

Hagerty was expecting him. Pierson unpacked, left the company camera on the bureau—the editor's pictures could be taken tomorrow—and set out for the regional office. In the corridor, a massive woman was operating an upright vacuum cleaner. She switched it off and admired him as he edged past. "Good day, sir."

"Afternoon."

"There's hornets all over the back of the building. They've got a nest somewhere. I don't know what they're looking for in here. I killed five of them in the rooms this morning. It's the hot weather brings them out."

The housekeeper appeared on the landing as Pierson descended the stairs. "Harriet, I need you after you're finished there."

Pierson drove to the regional office and parked in a patch of shade. Inside, he sensed no alarm, even though he'd told Hagerty the reason for his visit. The regional manager had not, apparently, communicated any of head office's concern to his people. This would have to

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be fixed. Baytown needed a little insecurity, a healthy injection of fear to get the lead out of its lethargic carcass.

Dave Hagerty was talking to his secretarial staff. All faces were smiling. He shook hands and ushered the Montreal boss into his private office. As was customary, he allowed Pierson to occupy the leather throne behind the desk while he sat in an armchair by the window. Hagerty's perpetual attitude was a bland-faced couldn't care less.

"Can I get you a drink?"

"Not yet, David. We have to talk about these sales figures."

"So I believe."

"Down a half point in the last quarter. Explain."

"That's because of the sell-in last winter, the big push at the beginning of the year. We loaded up the trade and they've been moving out those stocks ever since. Half a point down is to be expected."

"Not if you go back and keep pushing them. You've got the new flavor."

"Key Lime? It's a gimmick—you know that, Mick. The customers buy chocolate and white. A few of them may try the new one but it won't be a big factor."

"That's negative, David."

"But true. These people know me. I can't go into the stores and snow them. Or ask my people to snow them. They'd laugh at us."

The people in this part of Ontario *did* know Dave Hagerty. His reputation made him the best local manager Sherwood Milling had ever employed. Never before, only when Hagerty was pitching, had a Baytown fastball team gone all the way to eliminate the Toronto finalist and become champions in the Southern Ontario League. It was no small thing.

Pierson had traveled down five years ago to see the final game. Hagerty was a salesman then, not yet promoted. On the mound, in his red-and-white jersey, he looked well proportioned but not menacingly large. His calm face was what you noticed about him—those smooth cheeks, the oiled hair parted high, the pale eyes reflecting an almost weary determination to keep plugging at an impossible task. But it was a sham, a façade. With almost no wind-up, Hagerty could throw the ball across the plate at several different speeds. His control was absolute, he had no such thing as a wild pitch. Fifteen strike-outs in that game destroyed the Toronto visitors.

Pierson pushed a few things around on Hagerty's desk. "All right,

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the people know you. But they know you as a winner. You can't go along losing share of market."

"It isn't the same thing. We've got the share we've had for years. But our competitors have salesmen, too." Hagerty smiled, not bothered by this argument with his boss. "It isn't a ballgame, Mick. We don't slaughter them, we co-exist."

It was difficult for Pierson to display irritation because he kept thinking of Claire Soublière, who would be racing at Picton today and joining him tomorrow at the hotel.

"Don't try to sway me with your small-town logic," he said. "I guarantee those competitors you accept with such equanimity are concentrating on wiping you off the shelves. Respond, you lazy bastard."

Hagerty's laugh was so full of appreciation, the Montrealer could only take it as a compliment. "Mr. Pierson, sir," he said, "if you won't have a drink with me in the office, then come on over to the island. It's too nice a day to spend the rest of it in here."

"Not now, thanks," Pierson said. "We've still got work to do." Then he had a second thought. Claire might enjoy the outing. "But maybe tomorrow. Our home economist is coming through on her way to a press conference in Toronto. She'll be impressed."

Pierson had been to Hagerty's island on a previous trip. It was a protuberance of rock and pine trees two miles out in the middle of the bay, a place called Smuggler's Island, upon which the Hagerty family had built a summer cottage before David was born. Now he went there frequently, keeping a skiff with an outboard motor at the boat livery down in the harbor.

With Hagerty steering behind them, Pierson and Claire Soublière sat side by side, spanking across choppy water, faces wet with spray and stinging with sunburn. They could see the windows of the cottage half hidden by trees. At the pier, she was out first, making fast and giving a hand to both men as they struggled up onto the weathered boards.

"What would we do without this woman?" Hagerty said.

"I've often asked myself the same question," Pierson agreed. The three of them had established a nice rapport. Hagerty understood that the Montrealers were more than business associates, but his attitude toward them was mature, tolerant. Obviously, he was a man who could keep his mouth shut.

They had drinks on the porch facing west. Before long, Pierson

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suggested they head home—he was eager to be alone with Claire. Back in Baytown harbor with the skiff tied up and the hotel just around the corner, Pierson felt he had to say: "Come and have a drink with us." The gregarious Hagerty accepted the invitation.

They went to Pierson's room, bypassing the one on the same floor in which Claire was now registered. When drinks were poured, Pierson took up the camera. "Stand by the window, David. Not you, Claire. The editor of our house organ asked me to bring back some pictures for a feature article."

"How do you want me, drunk or sober?" Hagerty posed with his glass of whisky well in shot. "The camera does not lie."

It was a small bottle and soon empty. Pierson, anxious now to shed Hagerty, invited everybody to the lounge downstairs for a quick one. Hagerty declined but asked if he could stay behind and make a couple of telephone calls. Pierson handed over the room key. "Lock the door when you go," he said, "and leave it at the desk."

On the stairs, the giant chambermaid, the one who had warned Pierson about the infestation of hornets, was coming up with an armful of linen as he and Claire were going down. They had difficulty in passing her. "How'd you like to run into *that* in the water at a hundred and fifty miles an hour?" he whispered. Claire told him to be quiet.

They had a drink at a table in the back lounge. The window beside them overlooked the river and the western sky. Later, when the waiter brought refills, Claire said, "Look at the sunset! Can we go outside?"

They found a way out through a door onto the parking lot and carried their drinks to a stone parapet, the placid water ten feet below. The sky was mauve and pale-green. Traffic on a concrete bridge a mile away could hardly be heard. Pierson put his arm around Claire's waist. "Peace," he said, "it's wonderful."

She said: "How are you and Hagerty getting on?"

"I'm not here to wish him happy birthday."

"He sounded rebellious."

"We have ways of dealing with rebels."

"Like the Romans dealt with Spartacus?"

"I saw the movie. No, we don't nail people up. We just take away some privileges."

"Devious." Claire frowned. "I prefer direct action."

Pierson hoped she would not go on. The action she wanted from

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him was divorce. They had been over the subject before. Claire liked to shift the pieces of her life around until they came together in a way that satisfied her. She refused to understand why Pierson could not do the same, ditching Beverly and the boys to marry her.

"My parents tried to marry me off when I was seventeen," she said. "He was nearer their age than mine. His farm was the next one to ours in the eastern townships. I was all dressed up and on the church steps when I made up my mind. I took a taxi home, changed my dress, packed my bag, and caught a bus for Montreal."

"Wowee," Pierson said.

"I'm a stubborn girl. I inherited that from my father." She took a drink. "Do you know how he tried to get me to come home? He let the tractor run over his legs. Turned him into a wheelchair case."

"He didn't do that on purpose."

"You couldn't prove it. But I know my father. He's like me. Stubborn and self-destructive. If he has to hurt himself to win, he will." Claire finished her drink. "But he didn't win over me. I stayed away."

Pierson was afraid all this realism would ruin his evening. "You poor kid," he said, turning her to him, positioning her face to receive a kiss. "You poor, sweet kid."

Dave Hagerty was in a defiant mood when Pierson showed up next afternoon with his camera. Claire had driven away to attend her Toronto press conference, leaving Pierson feeling bereft and, at the same time, lean and aggressive. He took enough pictures to satisfy the editor before returning to Monday's topic. Hagerty listened to the pep-talk for a while, then interrupted in a bored, locker-room tone of voice.

"Yeah, I've heard all that. You guys at head office are all the same, trying to justify your existence. We're the ones who do the selling. Without us you're nothing and you know it."

There was enough truth in this to shake Pierson, but he came back. "Get it right, Hagerty. I'm not nothing, I'm your boss. The reason you have no respect for what I do is because you know damn-all about it."

"So what do you want? You want me to try harder? I'm a winner, man. That's why you hired me."

"And I can fire you. It's up to me. The directors won't settle for a stagnant share in this market. If it doesn't go up, you go out."

Hagerty laughed. "Try getting rid of me and see what happens.

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See how they react to the Sherwood line around here if you fire Dave Hagerty."

Back at his desk in Montreal, Pierson expected to be depressed after the confrontation in Baytown, but this was not the case. He felt stimulated, full of energy. Hagerty was only acting true to form. He was a fighter, so he lashed out when attacked. Good for him. Now he would carry over this aggression into his work and it would begin to show up in the figures for the next quarter. Pierson could hardly wait to see what would happen.

What did happen took him by surprise. Three days later, the editor of the company magazine came in and sat down without being asked. "That was a fine set of photos you supplied," he said.

"Glad to be of help." The boy had something else to say—his face was brimful, about to overflow. "And?"

"The pictures of you are very good, too. You and your friend."

"What pictures are you talking about?"

The editor placed two black-and-white prints on the desk. Pierson picked them up and looked at them. They were amateurish shots, not well centered. But the camera and the film were so good you couldn't fault the clarity. Pierson saw himself and Claire on the parapet with the river behind them. The angle was high. The source was his hotel-room window. In one picture they were arm in arm, in the other, they were kissing.

"I'd like to keep these." Pierson opened his center drawer and closed it with the pictures inside.

"You'll want the negatives. In case you'd like extra prints."

Pierson felt drained, and the sensation lasted into the next day. Claire was away on one of her product demonstrations so he couldn't discuss it with her. Anyway, what was there to discuss? Their rendezvous in Baytown was common knowledge now. He could tell by the glances and the smiles wherever he went around the building. The editor turned over the negatives, but that was meaningless. If he was unscrupulous enough, he might have made extra prints. And in any case, everybody *knew*.

The invitation for Pierson to come and have a word with the Old Man arrived at four o'clock. When he telephoned the executive suite to confirm a time, he was told to make it eight-thirty in the morning. He was so shaken, he went home early. Bev was disturbed to have

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him in the house at that hour of the day. His sons hung back, narrow-eyed, taking their cue from Mum.

"What's happening?"

"Nothing. I've got a big meeting in the morning." It had never occurred to Pierson that his wife, cooped up out here in their suburban house, would ever even hear Claire Soublière's name, let alone discover that he was involved with her. Now it was a possibility. How would she react? He remembered an incident years ago at the boating club where a rangy Beverly Binns had terminated an argument with another girl by putting a fist into her face and drawing blood.

"Can I make you a drink?" he asked her, going to the sideboard.

"Will miracles never cease?" she said. "Easy on the tonic water."

In the morning, he showed up in the executive suite showered and shaved and ready to take first prize for best-groomed executive in the stable. The Old Man had been at work for an hour. He was a tiny specimen, five feet six inches, no more than a hundred and twenty pounds. The story around the office was that he slept upside down clinging to a steam pipe in the basement.

"Michael," the Old Man said. "They tell me you've been a naughty boy."

"Yes, sir, that's true." He was the only person in the world, except for Pierson's parents, who called him Michael. Pierson knew instinctively the proper way of dealing with the Old Man. You hung your head in contrition. "I'm sorry, sir."

"You young fellows just can't get enough. Well, I was young once myself, believe it or not."

Pierson did not believe it. The Old Man had been cast in cement, like a garden gnome, then brought to life through an incantation delivered by the goddess of commerce.

Early in the day the Old Man's energy was at its peak. "I always thought she was a randy one," he mused. "Comes from racing in those powerful boats. Vibration must be something terrific." He regarded his sales manager through eyes like caviar. "How was she, Michael?"

Pierson knew what was expected of him and, God forgive him, he delivered it. "Sir," he said with a tiny smile, "she was terrific."

Then they laughed together, deep in their throats, the Old Man's laugh bringing up phlegm.

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When he could speak again, he said sharply, "You, young Pierson, will cease this affair forthwith. Understood?"

"Understood, sir."

"You're a married man with children. If this sort of thing ever got into the media, it could only do us harm. As for Miss Soublière, she'll have to go. We don't want that kind of woman working here." His mood changed. "Pity. She was a fine spokesperson for the Jessica Jarrow line. Good in French, good in English. Can we find somebody else to do the job as well?"

The eyebrows raised in Pierson's direction offered him first crack at the situation. His response was automatic. "No problem, sir. I'll get on to Personnel."

Claire telephoned that afternoon. Pierson was alone at his desk. "Thanks very much," were her opening words.

"What?"

"I'm out while you survive. Thanks for your support."

"Claire, you don't know the Old Man. There's no way to change his mind."

"I had a dream once in which a man said, 'If she goes, I go.' Never mind. Martin Luther King had a dream, too."

"There are other companies. You're the best, you'll—"

She cut him off. "I shouldn't be surprised. The lady always pays while the man goes free. Funny. We thought the Pill was going to liberate us from that kind of injustice. But it goes deeper than that."

"I blame Hagerty," Pierson said, feeling the need to get mad at somebody. "It must have been him. We left him in the room using the telephone. He knew the camera was there."

"So what, Mick? What does it matter who took the pictures?" Her anger had diminished; she sounded sad. "I thought you and I were good for years."

"We can still—" But she put the telephone down.

Pierson dialed through to Baytown, his finger trembling over the numbers. "Hagerty? You did it, you rotten bastard. You wanted to hurt me, but all you did was cost Claire her job."

"What are we talking about?"

"The pictures from the hotel-room window. Stab in the back, Davey boy."

"Are you drunk?"

"I might have known you wouldn't admit it. I think I'll drive on down there and take you apart."

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"Do what you have to," Hagerty said, his voice suddenly distant.

Pierson took the photographs from his desk and went in search of Claire. It was just after closing time. Claire's secretary was on her way out and she gave Pierson a jubilant smile as he went into the home economist's office. He found Claire packing personal items into a cardboard box. The sight of her in retreat sent shame washing over him like a powerful wave. He tried to talk to her, to touch her, but she wanted nothing from him. He was standing in her way when she went to get her coat and she hurt him with an elbow against his chest.

"We shouldn't destroy each other," he pleaded. "It's Hagerty. He took these."

He handed her the photos and that stopped her. She had to look at herself in this man's arms. She studied them back and forth for a long minute while Pierson breathed carefully. Then she returned the photographs, giving him her eyes at the same time. That was when he saw the extent of her pain.

"Come with me," he said. "I'm driving down to Baytown. Two hours. We'll confront Hagerty together. I'll get us satisfaction. I'll beat his brains out."

"What's that supposed to do for me?"

Pierson laughed. "Sorry, love. I assumed you couldn't beat him in a fight." He watched the anger evaporate as her eyes turned cold.

"When do we go?" she asked.

Pierson checked into the Coronet alone. Claire had changed her mind on the way down. After a hundred miles of thoughtful silence, she had said, "Drop me off at the Picton ferry. You go on to Baytown. I feel like taking my boat for a run."

"When will I see you?"

She smiled and he was relieved to see that she was coming out of her depression. "I'd love to see that beautiful island again. Can we have our talk with Hagerty over there?"

"It won't be like last time."

"Let's give him a chance," she said. "He was drinking. He may have taken the pictures as a prank. Maybe he thought we'd like to have them. He probably didn't realize the editor would develop the film."

It was all so reasonable, and none of it had occurred to Pierson before. "You could be right."

"So let's enjoy ourselves tomorrow. *I* intend to, anyway . . ."

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Pierson managed to get Hagerty on the phone that evening at his home. He explained the situation, including Claire's generous interpretation of how the incriminating film came to be exposed and her desire to spend tomorrow at the cottage on Smuggler's Island.

"By all means, let's go over to the island again," Hagerty said. "But I still don't know a damn thing about those photographs. And that's the truth."

Before he went to sleep that night, and with a good dinner and a few drinks inside him, Pierson called Beverly in Montreal. She sounded only half interested in what he had to say. "Sorry I couldn't phone you till now," he apologized. "I had to come back here in a hurry. The fire isn't out yet."

"Brian wants to talk to you."

The little boy came on the line. "Are you an explorer, Dad?" he piped.

"No, I'm a sales manager," Pierson said.

Late in the morning, after he had breakfasted and confirmed with Hagerty the time they would go boating across to the island, he rang Claire at the Picton number she had given him. "We head over at three o'clock," he said. "How do you want to meet us? Is there a bus from Picton?"

"Bus? I'm not a farmer—I'm coming over in the hydroplane."

Pierson met Hagerty at the boat livery. It was a calm day, only a gentle slap of water against the pier. Hagerty was in a good mood, and when his boss showed him the photographs he said, "She obviously loves you. But it wasn't me."

"I don't even want to argue about it. It's too nice a day and everything's going so well."

"Not well for Soublière," Hagerty said.

"She'll land on her feet. The good ones always do." Pierson climbed into the skiff and Hagerty got the outboard motor going. "She was upset at first but she's over it now." They rode under the bay bridge and out into open water.

Their progress was steady and smooth. The island was in sight, cottage windows signaling a welcome, when Pierson noticed a shape on the horizon. He watched it increase in size until it took on the distinctive silhouette of a hydroplane traveling at speed, riding high in the water. He pointed and mouthed her name over the roar of the motor. "Claire!"

Hagerty glanced back, grinned, and nodded. He twisted the throt-

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tle, adding on a little more pace, but it was clear that the powerboat would win the race. They waved as Claire thundered past. She turned her head—the robot shape surveyed them without emotion—but did not wave back.

"I hope she'll have the drinks ready!" Pierson shouted. But the racing boat was not heading for the island. It broke into a sharp turn, skidding wide, then dug in and headed back in their direction. They had only a few seconds' warning, no time to do anything—not that there was anything to be done.

Hagerty screamed what they were both thinking. "She's going to ram us!"

But this was not Claire's intention. A collision would damage her expensive, much loved craft. She judged the angle carefully and came surging past close enough that her wake capsized the skiff and left the men floundering in the water.

Pierson was a good swimmer. He stroked away from the overturned boat, then turned to look for Hagerty. He was swimming in the other direction, toward the island which was closer than the mainland.

The approaching roar of the hydroplane filled Pierson with a sense of inevitability. She was coming back to finish them off. He watched as Hagerty turned to face the speeding hull, putting up his arms as the great weight thundered over him, driving him down and under. The helmeted head turned as the boat slowed, the driver looking for her other target.

And there's the bottom line, Pierson said to himself. She let me watch while she did him first. He turned his back on her and began a leisurely stroke toward the mainland, the way he used to do in the back river at Cartierville when the war canoe overturned and some of the lads felt like swimming home.

They were surprised at the Baytown boat livery when a huge hydroplane came rumbling into the dock, looking like something out of a space film. The driver surprised them again. When the helmet came off, she proved to be a pretty girl. But not a happy one.

"Can we get the police?" French-Canadien accent—surprise number three. "I've killed two men."

The lady in room 212 seemed to be having difficulty. She was not seeking help, but Harriet had never needed to be asked. The chambermaid stopped arranging fresh towels and put her head out

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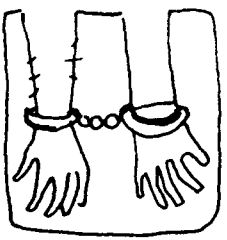
through the bathroom door. The woman, sitting on the edge of the bed with her young son beside her, looked up at last.

"Can't get the film in?" Harriet said.

"It's new," the woman explained. "My husband usually does it."

Harriet swaggered forward and took possession of the camera. "You open it here and the film drops right in—there. Then to take a picture, you push this gizmo here." Holding the viewfinder against her eye, she said, "I was taking pictures with one of these just the other day."



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a *NEW* short story by

PATRICIA MOYES

The English village as metaphor for gossip and intrigue. It has been used often, to be sure, but not yet often enough by our enduringly inventive neighbors in crime . . .

FLOWERS OF THE DEAD

by PATRICIA MOYES

It was Mrs. Evans, the village postmistress, who first put it into words. In the course of a leisurely chat with her friend Miss Sykes, who ran the Cosy Tea Shoppe next door, Mrs. Evans said, "There's something fishy going on up there, Lucy, you mark my words. You did say three 12p. stamps, dear? 36p., if you please. Yes, something fishy. I mean, where *is* she?"

"Not set eyes on her, not since the day they arrived." Little Miss Sykes was flushed with the scent of scandal. "Not a soul seen her. It's not natural."

"It's worse than that," said Mrs. Evans, with quiet triumph.

"Worse, Harriet?"

"A lot worse, Lucy. Somebody *has* seen her."

"Then that must mean—"

"Perce," said Mrs. Evans serenely, referring to her trusty postman, "was up delivering a letter. Not that they get many. And he says as how she came to the window and looked out. He saw her as plain as the nose on your face."

"Then she's all right," said Miss Sykes, a little tartly, for she was aware that her nose was not a thing of beauty and she felt that Mrs. Evans might have chosen a happier phrase.

"Ah," went on Mrs. Evans, "but then Perce says *he* came up behind

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her and pulled her away from the window. And that was a week ago, and no sight nor sound of her since."

"I think we should tell the vicar," said Miss Sykes. "A vicar can always pay a call. His duty, in fact."

"I told the vicar this morning," said Mrs. Evans, smugly one-up.

The subjects of their discussion were the new tenants of The Cedars, a large comfortable house which stood in two acres of garden just outside the village of Medhurst, in southern England. A Mr. and Mrs. Bristow. At least, presumably the lady was Mrs. Bristow. In a village the size of Medhurst, everybody minds everybody else's business, and it was common knowledge that Mr. Bristow was an author—quite a celebrity—who had rented The Cedars furnished for two months while Mrs. Winchester visited her daughter in the United States. He wanted, so it was said, to finish a book in seclusion.

The entire village, peeping from behind lace curtains, had seen the good-looking, middle-aged couple driving up the village street in their red Porsche to take possession of their temporary home. Since then, Mr. Bristow had been into the village on several occasions—buying groceries and stamps, dropping in at the pub for a pint of bitter, filling up the car at the one petrol pump. But nobody had seen Mrs. Bristow—except for the slightly sinister glimpse Percy had caught through a window of The Cedars. As Miss Sykes said, it wasn't natural.

Mr. Bristow had managed in a short time to get himself a local reputation for—well, oddness. Gruffness. Not a friendly man at all. To shopkeepers and barmen who tried in all neighborliness to engage him in conversation, he was polite but brief. Yes, he was a writer. Yes, he expected to be in Medhurst for two months. No, he was not in the least interested in gardening. No, he had not visited the nearby Roman ruins, and did not intend to. And the five-pound note would be placed firmly on the counter to indicate that the conversation was over.

On one occasion, Mrs. Evans—greatly daring—had remarked that she hoped Mrs. Bristow was not ill. Upon which Mr. Bristow turned on his heel and strode out of the Post Office without replying.

So, in the end, with the whole village whispering, Mrs. Evans had spoken to the vicar. And the vicar had agreed to call at The Cedars and see what he could discover about the invisible Mrs. Bristow.

The vicar, a gentle man by the name of Harland, had little success. On the contrary, he received something of a shock. He rang the doorbell of The Cedars with just the right amount of hesitation which

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went with his clerical collar. For quite a while, it looked as though there would be no response—and yet Mr. Harland had seen the Porsche through the open door of the garage as he came up the driveway. At last, heavy footsteps approached, there was a sound of bolts being drawn and keys turned, and the big door opened just enough to let Mr. Harland see Mr. Bristow.

"Who are you?" Godfrey Bristow demanded. "What do you want?"

Mr. Harland smiled diffidently. "Forgive me, Mr. Bristow. It is Bristow, isn't it? . . . My name is Harland. I'm your local vicar, and I thought it only courteous to call and welcome my new parishioners . . . "

"You'd better come in," said Bristow, without enthusiasm. He led the way through the hall and into the pleasant drawing-room.

Following him, Mr. Harland said, "I trust that Mrs. Bristow is enjoying her new home."

Bristow stopped abruptly and turned to face the vicar.

"I don't understand you, Mr. Harland. I am not married."

Harland blushed. "I am so sorry. I was referring to the lady who is living here with you."

"There is nobody living here with me," said Bristow sharply. "I have come here to finish a book and get a little peace. If I can." The last words were barbed.

Harland was flustered. "But people said . . . people saw . . . "

"People," said Godfrey Bristow, "probably saw my sister, who drove down with me to help me settle in. She went back to London by train the following day."

"I see," said Harland, unhappily. There was an uneasy silence. Then, gazing out of the window, the vicar tried again. "The garden is looking beautiful, as always. Mrs. Winchester is a most enthusiastic gardener. I see you share her interest."

"You do? How?"

Harland gestured towards the garden. "Well . . . all that fresh digging . . . "

Bristow smiled, a curious smile. "You are right," he said. "It struck me that that patch was wasted. I intend to plant chrysanthemums there. The flowers of the dead, as the French call them."

The vicar looked at Bristow very thoughtfully. He said, "You certainly must be a dedicated gardener, to put in all that work to plant flowers you will not be here to see. I am sure Mrs. Winchester will be delighted with them when she returns from America."

"I trust so," said Godfrey Bristow . . .

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Later in the day, Mr. Harland spoke privately to Mrs. Evans in the latter's small office at the back of the Post Office.

"I really don't know what I should do, Mrs. Evans. If Percy really saw the lady quite a few days after Bristow arrived, then his story of her going back to London just can't be true."

"Oh, Perce saw her all right, Mr. Harland. *And* he saw *him* pulling her away from the window, like I told you."

"Then there is the matter of the garden," added the vicar. "I happened to be in The Bunch of Grapes when he definitely told Harry that he had no interest in gardening. I don't like it, Mrs. Evans."

"No more do I, Vicar. As I see it, it's a matter for the police."

"You're right, Mrs. Evans." Harland suddenly became decisive. "I'll have a word with Sergeant Wilkes right away."

The police sergeant assured the vicar that he would make inquiries. He started at the railway station. This was really no more than a halt, presided over by Mr. Biggs, who knew everybody and when and why they traveled.

There were only two trains to London each day—one in the morning and one in the afternoon. Mr. Biggs was absolutely positive that no strange lady had traveled on either train on the day in question. Or on any day since, for that matter.

Sergeant Wilkes pondered, and then telephoned the C.I.D. Inspector in Porchester, the nearest town. The latter made inquiries at the Records Office in London. These revealed that a Godfrey Bristow had married a Miss Janice Purkiss in London ten years previously. There was no record of a divorce or of Mrs. Bristow's death.

The Inspector went to see the Chief Constable of the county.

"I'd like to get a team down from the Yard, sir," he told the Chief Constable.

"Before you do any investigations yourself, Inspector?"

"Yes, sir. The way I look at it, if we go round there it'll only alarm him and put him on his guard. I'd like to bring up the big guns before he knows we're onto anything at all."

"Very well, Inspector. If that's what you really want, I'll call the Assistant Commissioner."

And so it was that Godfrey Bristow found himself confronted in the drawing-room of The Cedars by a group of very high-powered detectives, asking him to explain the disappearance of his wife.

"It's perfectly simple, Chief Superintendent," said Bristow. "She's

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left me and gone abroad. I think she's in America at the moment, but I'm not sure."

"You told Mr. Harland you weren't married, Mr. Bristow."

"Well—functionally, as the Americans say, I'm not. I told you, Janice has left me. I wasn't going to start telling my life story to a total stranger."

"And you said that your sister—"

"The same reason applies, Chief Superintendent. That was—a lady of whom I am very fond. Not my sister. I don't have a sister. The lady drove down here with me and stayed a few days. Then she went back to London, leaving me to get on with my book."

"You told Mr. Harland, sir, that the lady left by train. According to the local station master, that's not true."

"A slip of the tongue," said Bristow, blandly. "I really don't know how she left. I just assumed it was by train. You see, I had been urging her to stay longer, but she knew that I should be getting down to my writing. So, when I came back from the village one day, I found that she had gone, leaving me a note."

"A note? May we see it, sir?"

"If I haven't thrown it away. I'll go and look."

A few minutes later, Bristow was back in the drawing-room with a crumpled piece of paper in his hand.

"Found it in the wastepaper basket," he explained.

He smoothed it out. In large hadwriting, it read, "Darling, you *must* get on with your book, and I know I'm a distraction, so I'm just creeping quietly away. Call me when the last chapter has been written. S."

The Chief Superintendent grunted. "The fact remains, sir, that this lady apparently did not leave Medhurst."

"Not by train, according to you," said Bristow, "but she could have taken a bus to Porchester, and gone by train from there. There's a much more frequent and faster service to town than there is from here, I'm told. Isn't that so?" Bristow turned to the Porchester Detective-Inspector, who was forced to admit that there was.

As to Percy's story, Bristow said that the incident had happened the day before his friend left. He had not, he said, pulled her away from the window. He had merely taken her arm to lead her over to his desk, where he wanted her to read a chapter which he had just completed.

The Chief Superintendent then questioned Bristow about the inconsistency of his saying that he had no interest in gardening, as

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against his apparent keenness on it in practice. Bristow replied that he had simply not wanted to be drawn into conversation in the pub.

Finally, the Scotland Yard detective told Bristow that, nevertheless, he intended to search the house and garden. Bristow objected that this seemed an unwarranted imposition on a law-abiding citizen. The Chief Superintendent pointed that it was, in fact, warranted--he had the warrant in his hand—but that if Bristow had nothing to hide, it would be to his advantage to scotch any ugly rumors. Bristow thereupon agreed quite cheerfully.

The search squad made a thorough job of it. The house was thoroughly combed, and so was the garden—including the newly dug chrysanthemum bed. Nothing was found. Not only was there no body, there was no evidence that a woman had ever occupied the house.

By now, the Detective-Inspector from Porchester was becoming, as the saying goes, acutely conscious of his position. At his insistence, important officers had been brought down from London to investigate what was evidently no crime at all. However, the London men remained polite, if cool. They apologized to Mr. Bristow for any inconvenience caused, and withdrew.

In private, they told their colleague from Porchester exactly what they thought of him, and suggested that he should not only stop wasting their time but should make it clear to village busybodies that no more malicious stories should be spread about innocent strangers. And there the matter rested.

The truth was very far from the villagers' suspicions, but it was also a world away from the version that Godfrey Bristow told the police.

One hears of many husband-and-wife teams—ice skaters, tennis players, fashion designers, and so forth. Godfrey and Janice Bristow were such a team, but in an unusual field. They were jewel thieves. So expert were they, so meticulous was Godfrey's planning of each operation, so perfect was Janice's disguise, and so professional Godfrey's craftsmanship that so far their names were quite unknown to the police. Every operation had been a complete success. Nevertheless, the same careful precautions were always taken.

The actual stealing was done by Janice. She possessed a most valuable asset—a face, which while pleasant and not unattractive, was utterly nonmemorable. She owned a large wardrobe of wigs and colored contact-lenses and was an expert in makeup, so that while

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the people she robbed remembered the obvious things like the clothes she wore and the color of her hair and even of her eyes, nobody could actually recall her features. Sometimes she stole from expensive jewelry shops in the guise of a blonde sable-coated millionairess. Sometimes she stole from private houses, having taken a humble job as a mousy extra washer-up after a big party. Her variety was infinite, and her expertise was complemented by Godfrey's.

Godfrey's contribution lay in the fact that he was an adept goldsmith and jeweler, trained in one of Amsterdam's great houses. He could have made a good living by using his skills honestly, but he found it less arduous and, to be frank, more fun to live dishonestly.

His cover was that of an author of light romances, and he actually wrote and even sold some of them. They were very bad and never made him any money. However, the general public has very little idea about how much authors earn and tend to have exaggerated ideas about it. Consequently, nobody found it strange that Godfrey, boasting a small bookshelf of volumes bearing his name, should appear affluent. Nobody knew that they had been published at his own expense.

His pose as an author also made credible the fact that he was in the habit of taking short-term leases on furnished houses in the country—always, needless to say, in a different part of the country. He was there either to finish a book or to glean local color.

From these anonymous bases, the actual robbery would be launched. Janice did the dirty work, and brought the loot back to the rented house, where Godfrey had established his workshop in the cellar. There, the jewels were removed from their settings, and recut and reset by Godfrey, who then sold them to unsuspecting dealers in various country towns. By then, they bore no resemblance to the stolen gems whose descriptions had been circulated to merchants by the police. It was a very smooth little racket.

The "house in the country" ploy did more than provide cover. It furnished perfect alibis, should they ever be needed. The procedure was always the same. Godfrey would negotiate the renting of the house, driving down in the conspicuous Porsche. A few days later—or rather, nights, for this was an after-dark operation—he and Janice would both drive to the house, he in the Porsche and she in her small black saloon, which would be carefully hidden. Godfrey always picked houses with ample garage space, or preferably a barn. The pair then returned to their London base.

The next day, both Bristows would drive down in the Porsche,

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making sure people noticed them. They would show themselves in the village and chat with the locals. For the actual operation, Janice would drive off after dark in her own car and return the same way. Meanwhile, Godfrey would remark in the pub that his wife had a slight cold and was staying in bed for a day or so. Nobody ever doubted this statement, so in the event of the police becoming suspicious—which had never happened, but Godfrey took no chances—both Bristows could provide honest witnesses to the fact that they had never left home.

So it had gone on for many successful years, until Godfrey decided that, with one more big haul, they could afford to retire and go to live in a house he'd bought in the south of France. Their selected victim for their last enterprise was an immensely rich widow, who lived in very grand style in London and had a huge collection of valuable jewelry. Janice managed to get herself engaged as a parlor maid.

In view of the size and delicacy of the job, it was decided that Janice should take her time and actually work as a maid for a couple of weeks in order to case the house and its routines, and lay her plans. And so the regular procedure was modified a little.

Janice, Godfrey said, should be seen by the villagers of Medhurst to arrive at The Cedars. However, once there she would stay indoors and not show herself, while he, Godfrey, circulated in the village and gave out the story that his wife was seriously ill and had been ordered by the doctor to have two months of complete rest, not leaving her bed. This way, she could stay in London for as long as she needed to ensure that the robbery went without a hitch. Her alibi wold be intact.

Paradoxically, Janice would have been extremely surprised had she realized Godfrey was double-crossing her. She always imagined him to be completely honest—in his dealings with her, that is. However, the fact was that Godfrey, in the course of one of his visits to France to negotiate for the house, had met and fallen in love with a young French girl named Suzanne. Suzanne had no idea that Godfrey was married, and looked forward eagerly to the day when he would be able to leave his business in England and come to join her permanently, as he had promised. On this basis, Godfrey laid his plans.

A couple of days after the Bristows' arrival at The Cedars, Godfrey had waited until he saw the postman cycling up to the house and

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had then drawn Janice's attention to something in the garden. Naturally, she had walked to the window, whereupon Godfrey pulled her away, saying that the postman should not see that she was up and about when she was supposed to be ill in bed. Janice found nothing suspicious in this.

On the morning after Janice had left for London in her little black car, Godfrey carefully packed up all her possessions and also his jewel-maker's instruments into two suitcases, put them in the trunk of the Porsche, and deposited them in the Left Luggage office at Porchester railway station.

Then he sat back and waited for the seeds which he had so carefully sown to bear fruit. It was hard work digging up the unused corner of the garden after dark, but well worth it. He reckoned that such a trail of suspicion would be irresistible to local gossip.

But even he was surprised and gratified at the response. Scotland Yard, no less! And they had made a complete investigation and gone away satisfied that everything was innocent, annoyed that their time had been wasted. The note signed "S", Godfrey had, of course, written himself.

When the police had gone, Godfrey drove to Porchester and collected the suitcase containing his tools. The other, he left where it was. After all, Janice would never need the contents again. When she arrived back from London at two o'clock one morning, he strangled her as soon as she had handed him the proceeds of the robbery.

Janice was never missed. She had long since lost touch with her family, and the Bristows' few friends knew that they were leaving England to live in France. Janice now lies buried under a flourishing bed of chrysanthemums, of which Mrs. Winchester is very proud.

Suzanne and Godfrey live happily outside Cannes. The small black saloon was sold to a used-car merchant in Porchester, but Godfrey had the Porsche shipped to France. She handles superbly on the *corniches*.

"Q"

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Eddie had a little hole-in-the-wall office just off Melrose. Lettered on the frosted-glass pane in the door was: EDWARD LAND, PRIVATE INVESTIGATOR.

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THE LAST PRIVATE EYE

by CLARK HOWARD

Gwen set her suitcase by the front door and went into the kitchen. She tossed a checkbook onto the table where Eddie sat with his coffee.

"There's eighteen dollars and sixty-two cents in the checking account. That's how much was left after I bought my bus ticket."

Eddie shook his head. "I can't believe you're really going back to Duluth."

"Believe it," Gwen said resolutely.

"This is January. Duluth's buried in snow—you will be too."

"Better snow than debts."

"Things'll get better," Eddie said. There was no conviction in his voice.

"The only way things would get better," Gwen said, "would be if you went out and got a regular job. With regular hours. And a regular paycheck. It takes two incomes to live comfortably these days, Eddie. One won't cut it."

"Look, I'll have some money coming in next week. Or the week after that, at the latest. This lawyer I talked to out in Beverly Hills promised me some divorce surveillance work—"

"Oh, please," Gwen said, rolling her eyes toward the ceiling.

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"And I made contact with another private eye up in San Francisco, who said he'd let me handle any Southern California business that came his way—"

"Stop it, Eddie! Just stop it!" she said. "Those are the same pipe dreams you've been handing me for two years. I've heard enough of them. People can't live on dreams."

Eddie's eyes flashed anger. "What do you want me to do, Gwen? Quit? Give up? I've wanted to be a private detective all my life. I've worked hard for it. You can't expect me to throw away all that training—"

"Training! Eddie, you were a Duluth traffic policeman for two years. The most serious arrest you ever made was that streaker in the Fourth of July parade. You call that training?"

"What about my *formal* training?" he challenged.

Gwen's eyes rolled again. "Excuse me. I forgot that you're a graduate—"

"*Honor* graduate."

"An *honor* graduate of the Acme Correspondence School of Investigation. Four hundred dollars and all you have to show for it is a printed diploma and a little kid's fingerprint set."

"You're wrong, Gwendolyn," he said, and now there *was* conviction in his voice. "I've got a lot more than that. All up here." He emphasized by tapping his temple with one finger. "I've got intuition. I'm a natural detective."

Gwen shook her head and for a moment her spitefulness turned to sadness. "You're a natural loser, Eddie. All you've got in your head is wishful thinking. Kid dreams. Like becoming a cowboy. Dreams, Eddie. That'll never come true." She sighed a weary sigh. "Goodbye, Eddie. I'll have a divorce lawyer get in touch with you as soon as I find a job and save enough to pay his fee. Take care of yourself."

A moment later the door slammed and she was gone.

Good riddance, Eddie thought after she left. He *made* himself think it. Tough thoughts were all that kept him from feeling the emptiness that clutched at the inside of his stomach. Yeah, good riddance. Who needs a whining broad around, anyway? Let her leave. Let her go back to Duluth and find somebody with a "regular" job and regular hours and a regular paycheck. Who cared? Not him. For sure.

Eddie drank the last of his coffee, picked up the checkbook, put a sportcoat on over his polo shirt, and left the apartment.

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Crossing the courtyard, he was approached by Mrs. Heath, the landlady.

"I need a month's notice if you're giving up the apartment," she said. "Otherwise you lose your deposit."

"What makes you think we're giving up the apartment?" Eddie asked.

"I saw your wife leave with a suitcase."

"Oh," Eddie said. "Well, she's just going back to Duluth for a funeral. Her uncle."

"Condolences. The rent's due tomorrow. She usually pays it."

"She was his favorite niece. Naturally she'll have to stay for the reading of the will. We expect her inheritance to be sizeable."

"Congratulations. Be sure I get the rent before noon. I like to get it in the bank the same day."

Greedy old bat, Eddie thought as he walked away.

He had a little hole-in-the-wall office just off Melrose. Lettered on the frosted-glass pane in the door was: EDWARD LAND, PRIVATE INVESTIGATOR. Eddie had been so proud the day the lettering had been done, he'd taken Polaroid pictures of it and sent them to all their old friends in Duluth. That had been two years ago. When he got to the office this morning, he found a white envelope taped over the lettering.

Inside at his desk, Eddie opened the envelope. "Dear Mr. Land," the letter read, "You are hereby notified that due to non-payment of rent you are currently in breach of your lease agreement. If payment in the amount of $420.00 is not received within three days, we will be forced to begin eviction proceedings. Yours truly, Prestige Realty Company."

Eddie put the notice aside and turned to his telephone-answering machine. The indicator showed that three calls had come in since he closed the office the previous night. He wound the message tape back, switched it to "Play," and picked up a ballpoint to write down any important information. Two minutes later he put the pen back down without using it. Of the three calls, one had been from the credit department of the menswear store where he bought his clothes, one had been an obscene call, and one had been a wrong number.

Sighing, Eddie started going through the small stack of mail he had picked up just inside the door. It was a very depressing assortment. A two-month bill from Pacific Telephone. A two-month bill

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from California Power. A two-month bill from Hollywood Furniture Rental. And a check for eighty-one dollars from Time Finance for skip-tracing one of their deadbeat accounts (he was paid ten percent of the balance owed).

Eddie sat back and did some quick mental figuring. The apartment rent, office rent, phone and electric bills, and office-furniture rental came to thirteen hundred twenty dollars. He shook his head. Thirteen-twenty to be paid out, eighty-one coming in. Maybe Gwen was right. Maybe he *was* living on pipe dreams.

Rising, Eddie walked to the window. Outside, it was a bright, sunny day, and the street was busy with people and cars going here, going there, carrying on the business of daily living. While I'm up here in my little office slowly dying, Eddie thought. Slowly but surely being choked to death by life. He shook his head in frustration. At one time it had all seemed so good, so natural, so *easy*. The move to California, getting his private investigator's license, opening the office, buying an ad in the Yellow Pages. Everything had been planned in advance, every step taken just so. It had all been so perfect.

Except that there had been no business.

Becoming a private eye had been Eddie's dream come true. Now he had it all: the title, the office, the ambition, the enthusiasm—everything he needed for success. Except one thing. Clients. He had no clients. None of any significance, anyway.

For two years he had been scratching at the door of the private-eye business, but nobody let him in. Pinkerton and Burns and a couple of the better known independents seemed to get all the big jobs—the missing persons, the insurance frauds, the important bodyguard assignments. All Eddie got was the leftovers. Chasing loan-company skips. Following some married guy to a motel with his secretary during their lunch hour. Locating the parking place of a car that its owner had stopped making payments on so the repo boys could come snatch it. Fifty-dollar jobs, hundred-dollar jobs. Scut works. Jobs any loser could do.

Eddie saw his own reflection in the window pane. "Maybe that's what you are, my friend," he said aloud to himself. "A loser. Just like Gwen said."

No sooner had he said it than the phone rang. It startled him. It was the first time it had rung during the day in three weeks. He snatched it up before it could ring twice.

"Land Investigations—"

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"Mr. Land," Donlevy said without preliminary, "the problem we have is our daughter. Her name is Laura, she was twenty-one last month, and on her birthday she inherited a fairly nice sum of money from her late grandfather."

"May I ask how much?" Eddie said.

"Just over a million."

Eddie nodded. Yes, that was a fairly nice sum. He wished he had the interest from it.

"Laura is our only daughter, Mr. Land," said Mrs. Donlevy, "and our youngest child. We have three sons who are all at least ten years older than Laura. She came along quite by accident after we thought our family was complete. I'm afraid we all indulged her a bit; not only Charles and I, but her brothers as well."

"We spoiled her rotten," Mr. Donlevy said. "But even so, she turned out to be an exceptional young lady: charming, gracious. She got excellent grades all through college—"

"She graduated Bryn Mawr at twenty with a degree in fine arts with a poetry major."

"It was that poetry that ruined her," Donlevy said bitterly. "That damned poetry."

"Now, Charles, don't upset yourself," his wife soothed, patting his hand.

"I'm right," he insisted. "You know I'm right."

"Yes, dear." She turned back to Eddie. "I'm afraid he is. Laura developed an interest in poetry during her sophomore year. More than an interest, really—it was an obsession. Poetry became her whole life: reading it, writing it, memorizing it, reciting it. We thought at first it was just a phase, something that would pass, but we were wrong. The love of poetry took over her whole being, like an addiction. She lost interest in everything else: clothes, boys, socializing. When she finished school, we let her spend a year in Europe. She visited the birthplaces of her favorite poets: Matthew Arnold in England, Charles Baudelaire in France, Gabriele D'Annunzio in Italy—"

"We thought that if we allowed her to overexpose herself to this poetry thing she'd grow tired of it and get it out of her system," Mr. Donlevy explained. "But that wasn't the case."

"No," his wife confirmed. "If anything, it made it worse. When she returned home she was totally preoccupied with poetry, completely consumed by it. She thought of nothing else, talked of nothing else, gave her attention to nothing else."

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"You've got it," Eddie said.

The two men shook hands. They sat in facing chairs in front of a dry fireplace.

"What do they call you?" Greb asked.

"Eddie."

"Okay, Eddie. Here's the story. I'm head of security for Donlevy Petroleum. This is the home of Mr. and Mrs. Charles Donlevy. Mr. Donlevy is chairman of the board of the firm that bears his name. It's the nation's third largest manufacturer of petrochemical products. There's a Donlevy product in half the kitchens, laundry rooms, garages, and locker rooms in North America—that should give you some idea of Mr. Donlevy's Dun-and-Bradstreet rating."

"I figured he was solvent when I saw the butler," Eddie said.

"I just wanted you to know *how* solvent," Greb told him. "I want you to be aware of just how much may be riding on how good a job you do. If you deliver for Mr. Donlevy, if you respect his confidence and protect his family name at all times, it could mean a great deal to you."

"In what way?" Eddie asked. There was no use being coy— Greb already knew he was hungry.

"Future work, for starters," the security man told him. "Background checks are required on all executive-level personnel hired by Donlevy Petroleum. You could get a piece of that. In addition, Mr. Donlevy's board occasionally needs a confidential report on an executive who might be compromising his position by gambling, infidelity, drug use, that sort of thing. Now and again we use outside operatives to investigate industrial espionage cases. And, of course, there's always the possibility of another personal matter, a family matter, developing in the future." Greb leaned forward. "Interested?"

"Interested," Eddie confirmed.

"Good." Greb rose. "Follow me. We'll have coffee with Mr. and Mrs. Donlevy in the breakfast room. They'll tell you about their problem."

Eddie followed George Greb through the elegant house to a small, cheerful, yellow-and-white breakfast room bathed in morning sunlight. Already seated at a splendidly set table were the Donlevys: both in their sixties, both grey and distinguished, perfectly groomed, stylishly dressed, impeccably mannered. Eddie was introduced. As he sat down, opened his linen napkin, and sipped coffee from a Limoges cup, he thought: Take a look at me now, Gwen.

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"Mr. Land, please," an authoritative male voice said.

"Speaking."

"Mr. Land, my name is George Greb. I'm a private security officer for a very well known family in San Marino. I'd rather not give you their name just yet. The family has a personal matter that needs the attention of someone outside the immediate staff. It's local work—I'd guess about three days' worth. Would you have an agent available this morning?"

"I'm afraid I wouldn't," Eddie said carefully. "Not on such short notice. However, if it's an emergency, or a delicate matter of some kind, I might handle it myself. Of course, the fee would be somewhat higher—"

"We're not concerned about the fee, Mr. Land. And yes, it is both delicate *and* an emergency."

Eddie looked at his watch. Twenty past nine.

"I can be in San Marino by ten-thirty," he told George Greb.

The address Greb gave him was on Orlando Road, in an area of San Marino where homes had grounds instead of yards, and household help answered the door. An area of oil money, citrus money, thoroughbred-racehorse money. An area surrounding the Huntington Library and Art Gallery, and only a short drive from the Santa Anita clubhouse. An area from which movie stars and other entertainers were, by unspoken agreement, barred from owning homes.

The driveway from the road to the house was a quarter mile long. A butler opened the door for Eddie and showed him into a library the likes of which Eddie had seen only in movies. It was a set from *Citizen Kane* come to life. George Greb came forward to meet him, a stocky man in his fifties, still in shape, with direct eyes and the presence of a police captain.

"Land," he said in a straightforward voice that matched his handshake, "I want you to know that I checked you out thoroughly before I called you. I was looking for someone with the least number of close connections to the rest of the investigative community in Southern California—someone who was young, hungry, and most apt to keep an assignment strictly confidential. I know, for instance, that you're a one-man operation. You don't *have* any agents."

"I never said I did," Eddie pointed out. "I only said I didn't have one available, which was the truth."

Greb smiled. "Literally, you're correct. Technically, it was a lie. I'd like your word that it'll be the last lie between us."

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"Then," said Mr. Donlevy with utter distaste, "she met this Mahatma whatever—"

"Mahatma Arishi," Mrs. Donlevy said. "He's a Hindu or something. I don't know exactly what he preaches—I only know he seems to be able to exert his will power over people like Laura."

"How did she meet him?" Eddie asked. His palms were sweating. This was a case! A *real* case!

"Through another young woman she became friends with while they were both visiting the birthplace of Friedrich von Schiller in Germany. Her name is Janet Goodman. Supposedly comes from a well-to-do family somewhere back east. She'd been a student or follower or protégé—whatever they call it—of this Mahatma Arishi. Apparently Laura was impressed by what this Janet Goodman told her about Arishi, and when they returned home, well—" Mrs. Donlevy's words trailed off and she looked away.

"George, would you mind?" said Mr. Donlevy.

"Certainly, sir," said George Greb. He took up the story. "The bottom line, Eddie, is that Miss Donlevy waited until she received her inheritance last month, put the entire amount in a private account, and moved into a sort of commune house that this Arishi joker has up in the San Gabriel foothills north of Tujunga. She's been up there five weeks now, refuses to see her parents or speak to them on the telephone, and every week she writes Arishi a check for five thousand dollars."

Eddie pursed his lips in a silent whistle. In the back of his mind, he began calculating his own fee. "Exactly what do you want me to do?" he asked the Donlevys.

"You answer that, George," said Donlevy.

"We want Miss Donlevy back," Greb said flatly. "Whatever it takes. The best way, of course, is to do it legally. Run a check on Arishi, see if you can get anything on him—either something we can turn him in for or something we can use to exert some influence to get him to throw Laura out of his group. But if it can't be done legally, well—" Greb shrugged.

"I understand," Eddie said.

"Can you help us, Mr. Land?" asked Mrs. Donlevy plaintively. Her eyes were moist. She reminded Eddie of a high-school teacher he'd had back in Duluth—the only teacher who had ever given him an A in anything. It had been for a book report on *The Maltese Falcon.*

"I'll help you, ma'am," Eddie replied.

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Greb rose and indicated for Eddie to accompany him. They returned to the library.

"My fee will be five hundred a day," Eddie told Greb when they were alone.

"Wrong," said Greb. "Your fee will be one thousand a day. Plus expenses. Like I said, Eddie, this case could do you a lot of good—if you deliver."

"I'll deliver," Eddie promised.

He had never meant anything more in his life.

The first thing he did was drive to the Hall of Justice in the Civic Center and run Mahatma Arishi's name through CII, the California criminal investigation and identification computer linked to all law-enforcement agencies in the state. That cost him ten bucks, slipped under the counter to a civilian police clerk. It was ten bucks wasted. It drew a blank—there was no criminal record under the name of Arishi.

Next, Eddie walked over to the County Administration Building and checked the county tax records for the address George Greb had given him of Arishi's commune up in the San Gabriel hills. He learned it was in the Dos Rios section of Zachal Canyon, a four-acre improved plot with a fifteen-room house on it. The taxes were being paid on the property by one Alexander Arishi. Either the Mahatma's first name or a relative, Eddie figured.

He went to the real-estate section and traced the ownership history of the property. Up until three years earlier it had belonged to a family named Brae; they had deeded it outright to Alexander Arishi. No lender was involved in the transaction and there was no mortgage on file. Which meant that Alexander Arishi had paid cash for the property. Eddie gave another silent whistle when he saw the sale price: eight hundred thousand. I'm in the wrong racket, he decided. He wondered if there were correspondence schools for becoming a guru.

Walking back across the Civic Center, Eddie went to the federal building and visited the Immigration Department. Showing his state ID card, he said he was doing a background check on a loan application for the Bank of America. Federal agencies, he had learned, would cooperate on loan and insurance investigations, but not criminal matters. At Immigration he found out that Alexander Arishi was a native of Punreet, India, had resided in Canada for ten years, and had entered the United States with immigrant status at Buffalo,

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New York, four years earlier. His occupation was listed as teacher. He was unmarried with no family, had no criminal record in India or Canada, and had been sponsored into the U.S. by one Bernard Towne, a retired banker who resided in Sherman Oaks.

Eddie drove out to Sherman Oaks. By now it was late afternoon, one of those grimy California afternoons that Eddie hated, the kind that spoiled the whole idea and image of California, the kind that let you *see* the pollution in the air, the kind that was always worse in the Valley. Eddie's concept of California, which had come into being back in Duluth in the wintertime, was swaying palms, soft ocean breezes, and seeing movie stars in supermarkets doing their shopping. Most of the palm trees, he learned soon after arriving, were pretty ratty-looking; the soft ocean breeze usually smelled fishy; and the only movie star he had ever seen was Keenan Wynn buying fruit at an outdoor stand in Farmers Market. Still, everything considered, it *did* beat Duluth.

The address in Sherman Oaks was a typical Spanish stucco with lots of moss crawling up the shady side of it, and lots of ivy doing the same on the sunny side. When Eddie rang the bell, the door was opened by an attractive Oriental woman.

"I'm Agent Foster from Immigration Statistics," he said. "I'd like to see Bernard Towne."

"I'm sorry, Mr. Towne no longer lives here," she told him. "He sold the house to us about two years ago."

"I see. Do you happen to know where he lives now?"

"Not exactly. Somewhere up around Tujunga—in a retirement home, I believe. But you might ask at that house on the corner. That's the Lohart residence. It belongs to former councilman Jack Lohart, but he hasn't lived there since his wife died last year. The people who lease it can tell you where to find him. He and Mr. Towne have been very close friends for something like thirty years. They both live in the same retirement home."

Eddie thanked her and walked down to the house on the corner. This time the bell was answered by a younger woman with a toddler slung on her hip. "Sure, I can give you Mr. Lohart's address and phone number," she said. Then she added suspiciously, "You're not trying to rent the house, are you?"

Eddie assured her he was not. "I'm from the San Fernando Valley Democratic Club," he said. "We just want to see if he'll support one of our candidates this fall."

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"Good luck," the young woman said wryly. "Councilman Lohart is a Republican. Anyway, here's his new address."

Embarrassed, Eddie mumbled his thanks and left. It wasn't until he got back to the car that he looked at the address she had written down. It was up in the Dos Rios section of Zachal Canyon. The address of Mahatma Arishi's commune.

There was still about two hours of daylight left, so Eddie decided to take a look at the commune and also see what the locals thought of the place. It took him an hour to get there, driving carefully on the winding canyon roads. When he finally arrived, he parked across the road from the place and opened the hood of his car as if having engine trouble. Looking across his air filter, he studied an old but nicely refurbished two-and-a-half-story frame house with a porch extending around three sides of it. Turn of the century, Eddie guessed. One of those Victorian fixer-uppers people used to pick up for a song until the real-estate industry wised up and double-sextupled the price of them. The house sat a good fifty yards back from the road. Eddie saw no sign of life, no activity at all around the place. The mailbox standing next to the road had a single name lettered on it: ARISHI.

Eddie drove back down to the northern edge of Tujunga, the nearest community. On Commerce Avenue, he found a few small businesses: dry cleaner's, convenience store, barber shop, drugstore. He parked and made the rounds, talking with each owner.

"Sure, I know the place," the druggist said. "Several older people live there. They have prescriptions filled here on a regular basis."

"What kind of prescriptions?" Eddie asked.

"That's confidential information."

Eddie flashed a badge he had ordered from a magazine ad. It had *Private Investigator* on it in relief letters.

"Well," the druggist said then, "I guess it's all right. The prescriptions are pretty ordinary anyway—*for conditions like arthritis*, glaucoma, varicose veins."

"No narcotics or mind-altering drugs?" Eddie was thinking drug ring.

"No, nothing like that. Nothing unusual."

Eddie went on to the dry cleaner's.

"Yes, I handle their cleaning," the lady manager said. "An orderly of some kind brings it in every Monday morning and picks it up every Thursday afternoon. Like clockwork."

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"Ever notice anything unusual about the clothes? Peculiar odors, bloodstains, anything like that?" Now he was thinking cult.

The lady shrugged. "No, they're just ordinary, everyday men's and women's casual clothes. Nothing special."

The convenience store was next. "Nice people, all of them," the owner told him. "Mostly I deal with the orderly. He's an older fellow who's kind of a handyman and errand-runner. An amusing sort—wears cowboy clothes and boots. He's always talking about the wild west. Him I see most every day. But sometimes two or three of the patients will hike down for magazines or pipe tobacco or shaving cream. The orderly always comes down in the station wagon to drive them back. Uphill's a lot harder than down."

"Why do you call them patients?" Eddie asked.

The man shrugged. "I just assumed that's what they were. It's some kind of a convalescent home, I thought."

The barber was the only one who knew anything about Arishi himself.

"Sure, I trim Dr. Arishi's hair every other Friday at eleven o'clock."

"What kind of doctor is he, do you know?"

"Oh, one of those fellows that helps people get their head straight. Not a shrink exactly, but a doctor that helps a person *think*. Call hisself a *meditationalist,* I think. Real nice man. Him and me, we discuss the history of barbering. He knows a lot about history."

On the drive home, Eddie reviewed what he'd learned in the seven hours since he started on the case. (Man, that sounded good: since he started on the *case.*) He was so keyed up about what he was doing that when he entered the silent apartment, it took him a moment to realize that Gwen wasn't there any more.

He walked around and looked at some of the things she had left behind: a *Cosmopolitan* on the coffee table, an apron draped over a kitchen chair, a bar of Dove on the bathroom sink. For a moment he felt something funny in his chest and stomach—he had to swallow hard to control it—then he got hold of himself. As soon as this case was over (this *case!*), he would go through the apartment and collect all her things and toss them. Maybe he'd even get himself a new place in one of the nicer buildings up on Sunset or down on Wilshire. He was sure he'd be able to afford it when he started handling regular investigations for Donlevy Petroleum.

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He sat down at the kitchen table to have a cup of coffee and organize his notes. Then he called George Greb.

"From all outward appearances," he reported, "this Arishi doesn't seem to be breaking any laws. He has no record, is in the country legally, pays his taxes, and has a good reputation. Apparently he has a number of other people in the house besides Laura Donlevy. There's a retired banker and a former councilman that I know of. From what I gather, he isn't holding anyone against their will—people seem to come and go as they please—and there's nothing unusual going on in the place as far as I've been able to determine."

"I see." Greb sounded a bit disappointed. "What's your next move, Eddie?"

"Surveillance," said Eddie. "Tonight. Up close. I'm going to prowl the place, see if I can find Laura's room, and observe her for a while. If I think she's drugged or otherwise being held, I'll report back to you and we can decide how to proceed from there."

"Excellent," said Greb, approval in his tone now. "The quicker you can wrap this up, the more pleased Mr. and Mrs. Donlevy will be."

"With both of us," Eddie added. He didn't want Greb to think he was slow. "I'll be back in touch with you by midnight."

Eddie waited until eight o'clock when the night was well settled, then put on a dark shirt and jacket and a pair of sneakers he'd dyed black a year ago but never worn. He drove back up into the San Gabriel foothills, parked half a mile down the road from the big Victorian house, and walked the rest of the way to it. There was no fence around the property, so all he had to do was simply cross a field and walk right up to the house. He circled the place from a distance first, then approached it from the side that showed the fewest lights. That happened to be the rear. There was a large open patio across the back of the house. Eddie eased across it and was about to look through one of the windows when the patio lights went on.

"Go for your gun, mister!" a gravelly voice ordered.

Squinting into the bright light, Eddie frowned. "What—?"

"You heard me! Draw!"

Across the patio was a grizzled old man of perhaps seventy, dressed in western garb, wearing a gunbelt with the holster tied to his leg.

"If you don't slap leather," he warned, "I'm gonna blow your belly out."

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"I don't have a gun," Eddie said nervously.

Then another voice, a woman's, interrupted. "All right, Billy," she said quietly. She walked onto the patio, a tall slim woman in tailored slacks and loose sweater. "What's the matter, Billy?" she asked.

"Caught this tinhorn looking in the kitchen window. Tried to get him to draw. He's yellow."

"He probably knows your reputation, Billy," she said. "Not many men are brave enough to draw against you." She glanced at her watch. "It's almost time for the *Rawhide* rerun. You'd better go turn on your TV."

Billy took a second to sneer at Eddie, then hurried inside. The woman came over to Eddie.

"I'm Elaine Hudson, administrative assistant to Dr. Arishi. Sorry about Billy. Sometimes he gets carried away. He only has blank cartridges in his gun, however. You must be the one who was asking questions about us down at the shopping center. The merchants called us. May I ask who you are?"

"I'm a private investigator. Edward Land."

"Well, Mr. Land, in which of our residents are you interested?"

"Laura Donlevy. Her parents believe she may be being held here against her will."

Elaine Hudson smiled. "I'm afraid not. Come in and see for yourself."

She led Eddie inside, through the kitchen, past a large, cheerful community room in which he saw several persons, and upstairs. She knocked on a door and it was opened by a rather plain young woman who said, "Oh, hello, Miss Hudson."

"Laura, this is Mr. Land. He's a private detective who works for your parents. They're concerned about you." She turned to Eddie. "I'll let you talk to her alone, Mr. Land. When you're ready to leave, just come back downstairs."

After Elaine Hudson walked away, Laura Donlevy said, "Why have you come here? What do you want?"

"Your mother and father are very worried about you, Miss Donlevy. They say you won't see them or talk to them on the phone."

"That's correct, I won't. They insist on trying to run my life, telling me what to do, and I'm tired of it. I'm grown, I'm of legal age, I have my own money, and I wish to live my own life."

"Your parents say you've been writing large checks to Dr. Arishi. They're afraid you're being swindled."

"My financial arrangements with the Mahatma are my own busi-

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ness. There isn't enough money on earth to adequately pay him for what he's done for me."

"Exactly what *has* he done?" Eddie asked.

An odd, almost incandescent radiance took over her face. Her eyes became luminous. "The Mahatma has put me in touch with the masters," she said reverently. "He has let me speak with the great poets of the past."

A spiritualist racket, Eddie thought. So that's Alexander Arishi's game. Crystal balls and Ouija boards. Tables that rise off the floor. Voices from beyond the grave.

"Do you know," Laura Donlevy said in awe, "that I have actually *spoken* with Vachel Lindsay? And Lord Byron and Anne Bradstreet? I have actually *discussed* their poetry with them! It was an *incredible* experience! I simply cannot describe for you the rapture I felt, the overwhelming joy, the elation!" She put a hand on his arm. "My next meeting is going to be with Aleksandr Pushkin. After that, I intend to meet Robert Burns, and Paul Valery, and Joyce Kilmer, and—"

"I take it you have no intention of returning home?" Eddie asked.

"This is my home now," she told him.

She stepped back into her room and closed the door.

Eddie went back downstairs. Elaine Hudson was waiting for him.

"I gather you didn't have much success," she said.

"You gather right. How does this Arishi do it?" he asked. "Hypnotism? Special effects?"

"Did it ever occur to you that he might be legitimate?"

Eddie smiled. "Not for a minute."

"You don't believe there are people with psychic gifts?"

Eddie shook his head. "Dead is dead," he declared.

"Come with me for a moment," she invited.

She led him to the large community room he'd passed earlier. It was a comfortably furnished room with high bookcases, large overstuffed chairs, Oriental rugs, and, in a corner fireplace, a crackling fire to ward off the cool night air. They stepped just inside the door where a man in his sixties sat at a table with several large books open in front of him.

"This is Councilman Jack Lohart," Elaine introduced.

"Not a councilman any more, my dear," he corrected. "Served my county for thirty years, but I'm retired now. I wish I wasn't, sometimes. If I'd only known then what I know now—"

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"Mr. Lohart's interest is in great political leaders of the past. Tell us who you've visited with recently, Mr. Lohart."

"Been talking with Benjamin Disraeli this week," the older man said. "Very interesting man. Last week it was Sun Yat-sen. Week before that was William E. Gladstone. Now *there* was a mind! And I've talked with Salmon P. Chase, Charles de Talleyrand, Henry Clay, Mohandas Gandhi." A twinkle came to his eyes. "I'm getting ready to debate William Jennings Bryan. Wish me luck."

"We certainly do," Elaine said. "By the way, where's your friend Mr. Towne this evening?"

"That capitalist? He's still in his room. Been arguing with Andrew Carnegie and Diamond Jim Brady all day. Missed supper because of them."

"I'll have a tray sent up to him later," Elaine promised.

Elaine then led Eddie to a corner where a woman in her fifties was softly playing a piano.

"Maggie Neal," she said, introducing Eddie. "Maggie was once a cabaret singer—a very good one, too. She gave up her career to marry and have a family. A tragic boating accident took her husband and three children last year. Maggie felt she was too old to start her career all over again, so she came here instead. She likes the old sentimental songs, don't you, Maggie?"

Maggie Neal smiled. "Remember this one?" she said by way of answer. She began playing a soft, slow rendition of "Ain't She Sweet?" "Milton Ager wrote that in 1927. Introduced it at the Oriental Theater in Chicago. You probably never heard of him," she said to Eddie.

"No," he admitted.

"But you've heard of the song?"

"Sure."

"I was just talking with Milton last week. We were discussing how ironic it is that so many people remember a man's music, but not the man."

She smiled again and began playing "Pretty Baby."

"Egbert van Alstyne," she said. "Nineteen-sixteen. Dolly Hackett introduced it on Broadway in a musical called *The Passing Show*. When I visited with Mr. van Alstyne, he insisted I call him Bert. He hates the name Egbert."

She went into a very light "Peg O' My Heart."

"Fred Fisher. First played in the *Ziegfeld Follies of 1913*. My, what Freddie's told me about Flo Ziegfeld!"

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Now she did "Body and Soul."

"Johnny Green wrote that in 1930. It was first sung by Gertrude Lawrence. He talks about her all the time." She glanced up at Eddie. "Got a favorite?"

"Uh, yeah. 'California, Here I Come.' "

"That's easy. Joe Meyer, 1923. You probably know who introduced it."

Eddie shrugged. "No."

"Why, Jolie himself. Al Jolson. In the road tour of *Bombo*. Two years later Joe wrote 'If You Knew Susie' for Jolson to do in *Big Boy*. Lots of folks think that song was written for Eddie Cantor, but Joe says different. And he ought to know." She looked up again. "Any more requests?"

"Not right now, dear," Elaine said. "I want Mr. Land to meet the colonel."

She took Eddie to a table in another corner where an elderly man in a World War I uniform was sipping brandy and studying a map of the world spread out before him. On the map were small metal replicas of tanks, artillery pieces, mounted cavalry, infantrymen, ships, and planes. "The colonel's an expert land and sea strategist," Elaine told Eddie after the introductions.

"Should be by now," the colonel chortled. "I certainly had enough coaching from the best in the business. I spent all last week with the Duke of Wellington. Brilliant man. We discussed Joachim Murat." He winked at Eddie. "This week I'm visiting with Murat, discussing Wellington." He laughed aloud and gestured at his brandy. "Offer you a drink?"

"Thanks, no," Eddie said. "Uh, who else have you visited, Colonel?"

"Well, let's see: Nathan Bedford Forrest. 'Bull' Halsey. Erwin Rommel—"

The colonel named a dozen military and naval leaders of the past, some Eddie recognized, a few he did not. He couldn't help but wonder what kind of research facilities Arishi had to be able to come up with so much diverse history. When he and Elaine returned to the hall, Eddie asked her about it. She smiled and shook her head.

"No research is done," she claimed. "All the facts you heard are in the individual minds of our residents."

"What you're saying is that Arishi can actually put these people in touch with the dead. Do you really believe that?"

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"*They* believe it," Elaine said. "That's what important." She tilted her head. "Would you like to meet Dr. Arishi?"

"What for?"

"To convince yourself one way or another about him."

Eddie shook his head. "I'm already convinced."

Elaine looked curiously at him. "What's the matter, Mr. Private Detective? Are you afraid to meet a man you think is a fake?"

"Not at all," Eddie said. He knew his tone was less than convincing.

"Prove it, then," Elaine said. "Let me see if Dr. Arishi can meet you right now."

"All right," Eddie said. He suddenly felt sweat on his upper lip.

"Wait here." Elaine went down the hall. On the way, she met the old cowboy, Billy, and paused to speak to him. Billy nodded at her words, and came down the hall to where Eddie waited.

"Say, pardner, I'm supposed to 'pologize to you for what happened earlier," the old man said self-consciously. "I wouldn't have drygulched you like that if I'd known you was friendly."

"Forget it," Eddie said. "No harm done." He studied the wizened old man. "You like it here, Billy?" he asked.

"Bet your spurs I do, son," Billy answered emphatically.

"Tell me why. What do you like about the place?"

"Why, all my friends is here," Billy said.

Eddie frowned. "You mean Maggie and Councilman Lohart and the colonel?"

"No, not them," Billy replied with a trace of exasperation. "I mean my *real* friends. The ones I visit. Virgil Earp. Pat Garrett. Charley Bassett. Bat Masterson. Wild Bill. All the old-timers."

Elaine came back just then and took Eddie by the arm. "The Mahatma has consented to see you," she said.

It was two A.M. when Eddie finished his verbal report to George Greb. The head of security for Donlevy Petroleum did not look pleased. "You haven't exactly been a big help to us, Eddie," he pointed out.

Eddie shrugged. "What can I say, George? I'm relating the facts as I found them. Laura Donlevy is there of her own free will. She appears to be completely content. So does everybody else in the place. And as far as I could determine, Dr. Arishi is promising nothing he doesn't deliver—namely, peace of mind and a tranquil environment in which to pursue one's own interests to the exclusion of nearly

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everything else. He's not breaking any laws, George. He's not even bending any."

"Do you think the girl can be taken from there by force?"

Eddie grunted softly. "I'd hate to try it. There's an old man with a gun who patrols the grounds." He didn't mention that the gun was loaded with blanks. "Anyway," he added, "then *you'd* be breaking the law. I'm sorry, George, but it looks like a dead end."

Greb walked Eddie back out to his car. "I don't know what I'm going to tell the Donlevys," he said dejectedly.

"Want some advice?" Eddie offered. "Tell them to start writing letters to her. Nice letters. Ones that tell her how much they love her but not how to live. If they'll do that, sooner or later she'll come back to them." He shook hands with Greb. "Thanks for the case, George. Just send my check to the office."

He would have the check, along with the rest of his mail, forwarded to him, Eddie thought as he drove away. Because he had made up his mind to close his office and get out of the private-detective business. At least for the time being. Gwen was right: he really didn't have enough experience to be a really good private eye. But in a few years, things would be different. In a few years, he'd be back—and he'd be the best.

In the meantime, he was heading back up to the old Victorian house. To be the assistant orderly, working for Billy. Mahatma Arishi had given him the job and promised to help him become a better detective. The Mahatma was going to let him visit with all the great detectives of the past. The ones that a lot of people didn't even believe were real. Like Nick Charles. Sam Spade. Charlie Chan. Ellery Queen. Philip Marlowe. The Saint. The Falcon.

They were all real to Eddie.

And he was going to meet them at last.

"Q"

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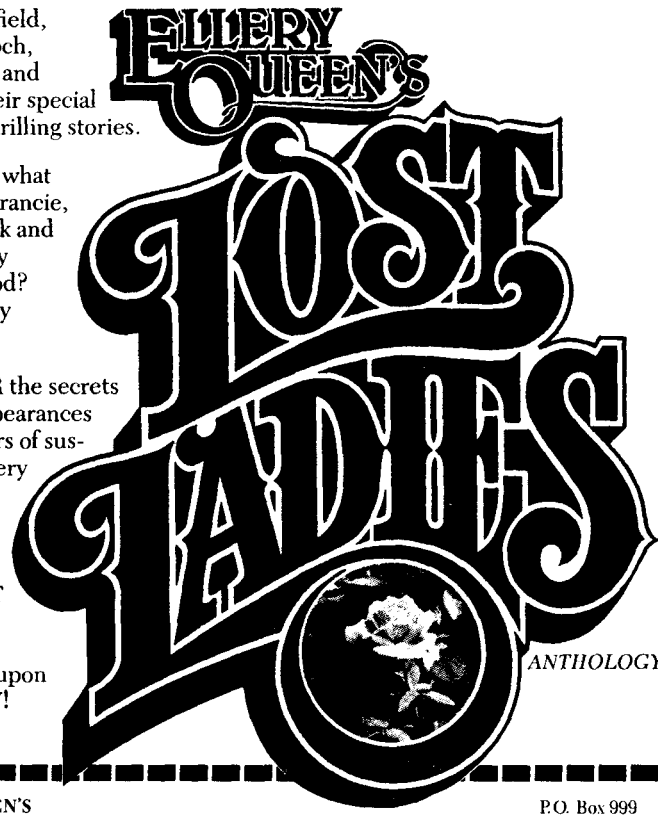

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ELLERY QUEEN'S
MYSTERY NEWSLETTER

CRIME BEAT

by R. E. PORTER

SPIES IN THE 1960s: Andy East's newly published guide to series spy fiction in the 1960s, *The Cold War File,* is a valuable study of 73 authors and four paperback publishers of the period. It ranges from le Carré, Deighton, and Fleming to sex-oriented series like Ted Mark's *Man from O.R.G.Y.* and the Man from T.O.M.C.A.T. books by Mallory T. Knight (Bernhardt J. Hurwood), both omitted from Hubin's *Crime Fiction* bibliography. Written in the style of a top-secret intelligence dossier, the book includes biographical and bibliographical information, detailed evaluations of each series, and data on series continuations after 1969. The 376-page hardcover volume, priced at $22.50, is available from Scarecrow Press, P.O. Box 656, Metuchen, NJ 08840.

PAPERBACK INDEX: Perhaps no major paperback publisher was ever so committed to mysteries as Dell Books, whose first eleven titles back in 1942 were all whodunits by authors like Ellery Queen, Agatha Christie, and Rex Stout. Now a 471-page illustrated book compiled by William H. Lyles, *Dell Paperbacks, 1942 to mid-1962: Catalog-Index,* lists all 2,168 titles (mainly mysteries) issued during those first two decades, with information on authors, pseudonyms, cover artists, etc. It's available at $45.00 from Greenwood Press, P.O. Box 5007, Westport, CT 06881. Lyles has also published a companion history of Dell paperbacks, *Putting Dell on the Map,* and we'll look at that in a future column.

L.A. MYSTERY TRAIN: We recently reported on a mystery train ride from New York's Grand Central Station, and now West Coast fans have an opportunity to ride the California Mystery Train from Los Angeles' Union Station. The journey follows a trail of clues to two days of dining, theater, and night spots in San Francisco, with a mystery to be solved along the way.

Joining the fun on the first ride last November were famed attorney Melvin Belli and mystery writer John Ball. The Mystery Train will run on a regular schedule through this summer's Olympics. Informa-

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tion is available from Train, Station 162, Laguna Beach, CA 92652.

PULP SLEUTH: One of the more entertaining private eyes from the pulp days was Robert Leslie Bellem's Dan Turner, who starred in his own *Hollywood Detective* magazine and also appeared in *Spicy Detective, Private Detective,* and *Speed Detective.* Stories and novelets from all four magazines are among the seven collected for the first time in *Dan Turner, Hollywood Detective,* edited and introduced by John Wooley (Bowling Green U. Popular Press). The original pulp illustrations are included. For more about this, see The Jury Box.

PASTICHE & PARODY: From England comes a nicely printed eight-page booklet on pastiche and parody in the detective story, *Murder Done To Death,* written and privately published by John Kennedy Melling. His comments are interesting and we hope this will be expanded into a much longer work soon. It's available at some mystery bookshops in this country at about $3.00 a copy.

BOUCHERCON MURDER: Plans are already underway for Bouchercon XV, scheduled for a mid-October weekend in Chicago. Coincidentally, Max Allan Collins, author of the recent 1930s mystery, *True Detective* (St. Martin's), has written a new novel about murder at a Chicago Bouchercon. It's titled *Kill Your Darlings* and it's due this spring from Walker.

WINTER'S READING: For lovers of British mystery and suspense, *Winter's Crimes 15* (St. Martin's Press, $12.95), again edited by George Hardinge, is a welcome addition to this reliable annual series. Included are twelve new stories by Elizabeth Ferrars, Antonia Fraser, P. D. James, Celia Dale, H. R. F. Keating, Peter Lovesey, and others.

COMING ATTRACTIONS: Following its success in reissuing Lawrence Block's Chip Harrison mysteries, Countryman Press will publish two earlier Chip novels in one volume, *Introducing Chip Harrison,* due this spring. These two, *No Score* and *Chip Harrison Scores Again,* are sex comedies rather than mysteries, but should appeal to Block's many fans. Countryman is reprinting an early Block mystery, *After the First Death,* at the same time.

Coming this spring are two more classic reprints from International Polygonics—*The Fiend* by Margaret Millar and *The Detections of Dr. Sam: Johnson* by Lillian de la Torre.

The newest suspense novel by bestselling author Mary Higgins Clark, *Stillwatch,* is due from Simon & Schuster in April. It's about a young woman shadowed by a childhood secret.

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BLOODY VISIONS

by CHRIS STEINBRUNNER

The "pirate" movie is rarely spotted on the horizon these days—a genre of the cinema mystery that encompassed a good deal of historical crime and violence, though colorfully told. Recently, however, an adventure epic called *Nate and Hayes* has brought the swashbuckler back into focus, by being robust, devil-may-care, and rattling good.

Nate and Hayes takes us back to a time where lives were cheap on the sea lanes of the world and slave-trading was an honest, though risky, profession. In the mid-1800s, the South Pacific islands were constantly raided by "blackbirders," as slavers were called, and our hero—Captain "Bully" Hayes—is one of these, an adventurer who is no better than he ought to be, looking for gold coin and protecting his flank with a ready sword. His flank *needs* protecting, as his adversary is the cutthroat Ben Pease, surely the most wicked, unprincipled murderer in all the South Seas.

Pease, to demonstrate his villainy for us, gleefully kills the missionary parents of the fiancé of a young cleric-in-training, Reverend Nathaniel, on the latter's wedding day and makes off with the girl. The young and innocent missionary—left for dead—revives, to begin a stumbling, island-by-island search for his Sophie, forging an unlikely alliance along the way with the hardened Hayes, who is after Pease for other reasons but has an eye for the girl as well. Together they cut their way through crime-infested, vigorously depraved ports (as might be envisioned by Hogarth under a sun umbrella), tackle headhunter tribes and the German Naval Might, and wind up ready to be hanged. There is hope, of course, for an ingenious, flamboyant, last-minute rescue . . .

Enchantingly filmed in South Pacific locations around New Zealand, *Nate and Hayes* in its exuberance as well as its graphic depiction of historical criminality recalls to mind some of the more memorable pirate films of yore. *Treasure Island,* from Stevenson's classic, seminal novel of piracy, was first brought to the screen in silent days and has been used by moviemakers often since. Visually, it is hard to resist, especially its opening sequence in which young Jim Hawkins, at the lonely Admiral Benbow Inn, is witness to a gathering of seafaring thieves and the passing of the dread "black spot." The recipient, Blind Pew, is soon trampled to death on the road. Not long thereafter, Jim finds himself where every good pirate yarn should lead: on the high seas "with some of the wickedest men that God ever allowed," among them the one-legged Long John Silver. Silver was the ultimate pirate figure of melodrama, portrayed on screen at cunning best by Wallace Beery in 1934 and Robert Newton

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in 1962. Indeed, the latter actually spun out the role—suitably laundered—into a television series.

Some of the most fondly remembered adventure epics portrayed essentially noble heroes forced into the crime of piracy. Such was the case with the English Captain Peter Blood, from Rafael Sabatini's novel, a good man who is sold into slavery but escapes a hellish island prison to become a feared buccaneer, in league for a time with a French seafaring villain, Basil Rathbone. *Captain Blood* (1935) was Errol Flynn's first swashbuckler and set high standards for the "good"-pirate drama. Tyrone Power in *The Black Swan* (1942), again from a Sabatini book, was also one of these, tutoring first under the unredeemably lawless Redbeard (George Sanders) and later under reformed pirate Morgan (Laird Cregar).

Not all pirates reformed or were good-hearted, of course: Charles Laughton pulled out all stops in his portrayal of *Captain Kidd* (1945), killing for treasure on the high seas, and Robert Newton as *Blackbeard the Pirate* (1952) made his visage all the more terrifying by lighting little flaming fuses in his hirsute face!

Even musicals and comedies have spotlighted pirate figures, from Gilbert and Sullivan's *Pirates of Penzance* to J. M. Barrie's *Peter Pan,* whose surprisingly bloodthirsty, murderous Captain Hook is beyond reform.

Most of the central characters of pirate films are drawn from real-life figures in the annals of high-seas crime—including 1958's *The Buccaneer,* which tells how pirate Jean Lafitte helped stem the British invasion during the War of 1812.

Captain Bully Hayes of *Nate and Hayes* was also a historical person, hero of South Pacific pirate sagas, and he is played with the right touch of moody muscularity by Tommy Lee Jones *(The Eyes of Laura Mars, The Executioner's Song).* Together with Michael O'Keefe, as the bumpkin Reverend Nate, he resurrects a light-hearted return to the full-sailed age of sword-swashing screen piracy.

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The second part of the two-part interview with Jean Darling that was promised for this issue will appear instead in the May issue of *EQMM*—along with a new story by the actress and author, set in a theatrical boarding house in New York in 1953.

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THE JURY BOX

by ALLEN J. HUBIN

Books about mystery fiction and its authors were quite uncommon before 1960, despite the abundance of the fictions themselves. As revealed by Jon L. Breen's definitive and insightful guide to such work, *What About Murder?* (1981), mysteries began to attract considerably more book-length critical attention in the 1960s, and since 1970 the flow has become a veritable flood.

The first book on Agatha Christie appeared in 1967. At least 14 more followed, to make Christie one of the most extensively analyzed mystery authors (Doyle leads the list, of course). The latest is *The Agatha Christie Companion* by Dennis Sanders and Len Lovallo (Delacorte; $19.95) which, despite all the previous plowing, turns over the ground in usefully comprehensive fashion. Each Christie novel, short story, play, and film or TV adaptation is here examined in the context of Christie's life as revealed in her own autobiography, that of her husband (Sir Max Mallowan), and other published sources. Plot summaries for all works are provided and (one of the most enjoyable features) contemporary reviews are contrasted.

Many of us who were radio listeners in the 1930s-1950s remember the programming of those years with fond, even wistful nostalgia. Certainly I do, and I relish the occasional book on the subject. Prime material for relishing is now offered by *The Sound of Detection: Ellery Queen's Adventures in Radio* by Francis M. Nevins, Jr., and Ray Stanich (Brownstone Books, 1711 Clifty Drive, Madison, IN; $6.95). Nevins is the author of the celebrated and authoritative study of the Queen opus *(Royal Bloodline,* 1974) and here provides the commentary. Stanich is an authority on old-time radio and collaborates with Nevins on a radio log. The result is an informed and sensitive work that makes one mourn again intensely the passing of Ellery Queen, authors and detective, and regret that of over 300 Queen radio shows only 20 have survived on audio tape.

Perhaps the most active publisher of commentary on our genre is Bowling Green University Popular Press, whose latest catalog lists 29 such volumes (including backlist), not to mention two mystery-fiction reprint series and a semiannual magazine *(Clues).* The Press's latest release, more anthology than commentary, is *Robert Leslie Bellem's Dan Turner, Hollywood Detective,* edited and introduced by John Wooley ($16.95 cloth, $7.95 paper). Bellem was a compulsively prolific pulp writer, and these stories (out of an estimated 300 he wrote about private eye Turner) well represent the more extravagant of pulp fiction, with its exuberance, impossibly slangy, pell-

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mell prose, and plots than can shatter under the weight of a moment's inspection.

The roots of *The Year's Best Mystery & Suspense Stories 1983*, edited by Edward D. Hoch (Walker; $13.95 cloth, $6.95 paper), go back to the beginning of the *Best Detective Stories of the Year* volumes in 1946. This is a superior assemblage; I believe the series has never been better represented. Here are 16 diverse stories, nine from this magazine, and not a weak one among them. The invaluable feature called Yearbook of the Mystery & Suspense Story identifies the best novels of 1982, in the judgment of Hoch and Martin H. Greenberg, and provides complete listings of anthologies, short-story collections, relevant biographical and critical nonfiction, award winners, deaths in the field, and honor-roll short stories.

Further to dispel any doubt about the vitality of the modern mystery short story are the annual collections of tales from this magazine. The latest of these is *Ellery Queen's Lost Men* (Dial Press; $12.95), edited by Eleanor Sullivan. This one perhaps ranges further in time than most, with original copyright dates from 1910 to 1978. That earliest entry is a Thinking Machine story by Jacques Futrelle, to whose memory this anthology is dedicated, and we progress in great pleasure through the likes of Edna Ferber, Michael Innes, Stanley Ellin, John Dickson Carr, L. J. Beeston, and Ellery Queen, ending with Graham Greene's masterful "The Third Man."

An International Treasury of Mystery & Suspense (Doubleday; $15.95), edited by Marie Reno, is an excellent sampler of the delights of our criminous fancies, one that will give pleasure both to the seasoned reader and to the newcomer. The 18 tales are grouped: California private eyes, irony and terror, heirs of Sherlock Holmes, variations in the classic theme, suspense in sunny climes, and crime solving past and present. Authors are mostly the well represented familiar: Hammett, Stout, P. D. James, Upfield, Simenon, Sayers. The less common to our field include Nadine Gordimer, Stephen King, Isak Dinesen, and the book climaxes with Christie's classic "Murder on the Orient Express."

Also available is an anthology from *Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine, Borrowers of the Night* (Dial; $12.95), edited by Cathleen Jordan. Here are 27 tales, published originally between 1961 and 1974, which plumb our genre in the broadest sense, drawing strong elements of fantasy and horror. The standard is uniformly good, and authors include both the familiar (Lawrence Block, August Derleth, Ron Goulart, Bill Pronzini, Donald E. Westlake) and the less so.

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a *NEW* short story by

PETER LOVESEY

In an interview with Peter Lovesey in The Craft of Crime *(Houghton Mifflin), John C. Carr quotes him as saying, "I think the essential things, the human qualities, go back." Oh, yes. As witness this unexpectedly intimate view of a young lady named Arabella between the months of January 1878 and May 1885 . . .*

ARABELLA'S ANSWER

by PETER LOVESEY

ANSWERS TO CORRESPONDENTS

January 1878

Arabella. If you are serious in aspiring to elicit a reply from a reputable journal such as ours, you should take the elementary trouble to express yourself in legible handwriting.

March 1878

Arabella. Your Papa is perfectly right. A young girl of fifteen should not be seen at a dinner party at which unmarried gentlemen are guests. Your protestations at being, as you express it, "confined" to your room do you no credit. A wiser girl would be content to occupy herself in some profitably quiet pastime, such as sewing, for the duration of the party. So long as you childishly persist in questioning decorum, you reveal your utter unreadiness for adult society.

October 1879

Arabella. No gentleman sends flowers or any other presents to a young lady to whom he has not been introduced. Let him learn some manners and present his card to your parents if he entertains a

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notion of making your acquaintance. We doubt whether his conduct thus far will commend itself to your Papa.

December 1879

Arabella. In common civility you are bound to receive the young gentleman if he has called on your Papa and satisfied him that his intentions are honourable. The "misgivings" that you instance in your letter are of no consequence. A gentleman should be judged by his conduct, not his outward imperfections. The protruding teeth and shortness of stature are no fault of his, any more than your tallness is of your making. We expect to hear that you have set aside these absurd objections and obeyed your parents, who clearly have a more enlightened apprehension of this young gentleman than yourself.

February 1880

Arabella. We suspect that your anxieties are prompted by the shyness which is natural in a young girl, but which properly must grow into the self-possession of a lady. How can you possibly say that the gentleman's blandishments are unwelcome when you have met him only once in your parents' home?

June 1880

Arabella. She who finds difficulty in making conversation with her escort should not despair. There are many talkers, but few who know how to converse agreeably. The art of conversation may be learned. Mark how the most accomplished of conversationalists avoid conceit and affectation. Their speech is characterised by naturalness and sincerity which may be spiced with humour, but never oversteps the limits of propriety.

August 1880

Arabella. We are surprised by your inquiry. Kissing is not a subject that we care to give advice upon, particularly to members of the sex that may receive such tokens of affection, in certain circumstances, but ought never to initiate them.

January 1881

Arabella. To give no answer if the young man proposes to marry you would not only be discourteous; it would not achieve the outcome you apparently expect. When the lady is so ill-advised as to say

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nothing, the gentleman is entitled to publish the banns at once, for "silence gives consent". Have you really considered how the gentleman is placed? Making a declaration of love is one of the most trying ordeals he will experience in his life. We counsel you to give the most earnest consideration to the question, if you are so fortunate as to be asked it. Many are not, and live to regret it. Some have been known to say "No" when they meant "Yes".

March 1881

Arabella. Your letter reaffirms our faith in the innate wisdom of womankind. In conveying our felicities on your forthcoming marriage, we would advise you that a gown of ivory satin trimmed with lace and orange blossoms is *de rigeur*.

August 1881

Arabella. We see no reason why you should object to cleaning your husband's boots, as you have no servant, but we cannot comprehend your meaning when you state that he "leaves them outside his bedroom door at night". Are we to gather from this that you occupy a different bedroom from your husband? If so, is this at your behest, or his?

October 1881

Arabella. As we have frequently reiterated in this column, the joys of marriage grow out of duty, honesty, and fidelity. If, as you assure us, you have not been negligent in any of these, you must ask yourself if there is not some other impediment in your behaviour, which, when remedied, will allow a happier intimacy to ripen. Have you considered whether your choice of clothes and the way you dress your hair are pleasing to your husband?

November 1881

Arabella. As a rule we deprecate the recourse to powder and rouge as an enhancement to good looks. It is possible, however, that ill-health or the anxiety sometimes experienced in the first months of marriage may deprive the skin of its colour and complexion, and in such cases art may be called in as an aid to nature.

January 1882

Arabella. We condemn in the strongest possible terms the practice of using drops of belladonna in the eyes. Belladonna is the extract

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from that noxious plant, the deadly nightshade (atropa belladonna). To keep it on one's dressing table would be dangerous and foolish. A pinch of boracic powder dissolved in warm water and used with an eye-cup is a safe and beneficial tonic that may be relied upon to bring a brightness to the eyes. A little vaseline or cocoa-butter well rubbed into the eyebrows and lashes at night will promote their growth. Frequent brushing with a small brow-brush is also efficacious.

March 1882

Arabella. Your difficulties are more common among newly-married wives than probably you realise.

May 1882

Arabella. We think it most injudicious for a wife to listen to tale-bearing neighbours. The company a husband keeps is usually dictated by the duties and obligations of his professional and business life.

To expect a man to pursue his manifold interests without ever communicating with the sex who make up half of humanity is to expect the impossible. Shut your ears to gossip. If you have genuine cause for concern, it will manifest itself in other ways. Hold fast to our previous advice. Endeavour to be as pleasant and engaging as possible, to keep your husband at home. Propagate the first shoots of affection as soon as they appear.

July 1882

Arabella. The experience you describe is both regrettable and deplorable, and we trust that there has been no recurrence of the incident since you wrote your letter. If the gentleman concerned was a Frenchman, as you suppose, he may be unused to our British code of decorum. He may, to be as charitable as we can to our cousins from across the Channel, have been under a misapprehension as to your married state. Yet we are bound to observe that a gentleman who attempts to ingratiate himself with a lady, whether married or not, *in a public street,* is a disgrace to his nation. If he should importune you again, look straight onwards, ignore his addresses, and tell your husband as soon as you get home. We assume, of course, that the Frenchman's conduct was not encouraged by any light manner on your part.

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September 1882

Arabella. We sympathise with your position. It is true that in a previous issue we gave our approval to the judicious use of rouge and powder to enhance your pale complexion in the expectation that it would please your husband. Now that he appears to blame the rouge-box for the excessive behaviour of the foreign gentleman who pesters you, we think you are bound to give up using it.

January 1883

Arabella. We seem to remember cautioning you last year of the dangers attendant upon the use of belladonna drops and we are surprised that you should waste our time with a further enquiry. For the benefit of other readers, we repeat that belladonna is a deadly poison and ought never to be used for cosmetic purposes.

March 1883

Arabella. A bereavement such as you have so tragically and so suddenly suffered will strike a chord of sympathy in every young wife who has known that dread fear of impending tragedy when her husband is unwell. You may console yourself with the knowledge that you did all that was possible to comfort your brave consort in the throes of his delirium and convulsion. To have abandoned him even for a short time to have summoned a physician was unthinkable, and, from your account of the severity of the onset, would not have made a jot of difference. The proper dress materials for deep mourning are crape and silk. We can recommend Messrs. Jay of Regent Street, the London General Mourning Warehouse, for the most sympathetic assistance and advice on suitable costumes, mantles, and millinery. Their advertisement will be found elsewhere on these pages.

July 1883

Arabella. We are surprised that you should ask such a question. Velvet is utterly inadmissible for a widow in deep mourning.

September 1883

Arabella. Certainly not. In the first year of mourning, a jersey would be unseemly in the extreme.

October 1883

Arabella. Any person who has the temerity to address a widow of

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less than one year in familiar terms forfeits the right to the title of gentleman. The fact that he is French is no mitigation of the offence. Indeed, if he is the same person of whom you had cause to complain on a previous occasion, he must be a blackguard of the deepest dye. On no account should you permit him to engage you in conversation. Avoid the possibility of meeting him again by varying the route you are accustomed to taking when walking to the shops. As the proverb wisely cautions us, better go round than fall into the ditch.

March 1884

Arabella. Black beads are permissible in the second year of mourning, but gold or silver or pearls would be disrespectful. We cannot understand how any widow could consider adorning herself in jewellery so soon after the loss of the one to whom she pledged her entire life. We are shocked at your enquiry, and we can only ascribe it to an aberration consequent upon your grief. Set aside all thoughts of gratifying yourself by such vanities.

May 1884

Arabella. It would be in the worst possible taste for a widow of fifteen months to "walk out" with a gentleman, whatever he professes in the name of sympathy for you and respect for the one you mourn. Let him show his sympathy and respect by leaving you to your private grief until at least two years have passed since your bereavement. As to the "restlessness" that you admit to feeling, this may be subdued by turning your energy to some useful occupation in the house or garden. Many a widow has found solace in the later stages of mourning by cultivating flowers.

July 1884

Arabella. How can we proffer advice if you do not fully acquaint us with the circumstances in which you live? Of course you cannot employ your time in the garden if you live in a second-floor apartment without a garden, but there is no reason why you should not cultivate plants of the indoor variety. Contrary to a widely held belief, it is not necessary to have a conservatory for the successful rearing of plants in the home. Certain varieties of fern may be cultivated with gratifying success in, say, a drawing room or dining room. All that they require is a little water regularly given. We have seen some most attractive species growing under glass domes, and some prefer them to wax flowers.

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September 1884

Arabella. The variety known as maidenhair is in our opinion the prettiest. Perhaps you over-watered the lady fern.

November 1884

Arabella. Since you seem unable to care adequately for the ferns we recommend, we suggest you try a hardier indoor plant of the palm variety, such as an aspidistra. The aspidistra will grow best in a pot of sufficient size to allow for the roots to develop. A brass plant-pot of the largest size supplied by Messrs. Pugh & Martindale would be ideal. Their shop is not far from where you live. The address may be found in the advertisement on the back page of this issue.

January 1885

Arabella. We are gratified to hear that you purchased a large brass pot for your aspidistra, as we suggested in our November issue, and that it is thriving. With regard to another matter that you mention, we wish it to be known that your letters until the latest did not make it clear that the French gentleman whose attentions to you appeared so importunate is, in fact, the owner of the art gallery over which you live. Had we been privy to this information before, we might have taken a different view of his conduct. It is only civil for a neighbour to raise his hat and pass the time of day to a lady, and his invitation to "walk out", while still unthinkable, may now be seen in a more favourable light, with allowance for alien customs. Your own sentiments towards this gentleman must remain irreproachable.

February 1885

Arabella. We did not expect that our altruistic comments in the last issue would encourage an effusion of such unseemliness. No man, however "handsome, immaculately tailored, and charmingly civil towards the fair sex", be he from France or Timbuktu, ought to be described in such unbecoming terms by one who, not two years since, buried her dear departed husband. If you have a vestige of propriety left, dismiss him from your thoughts.

March 1885

Arabella. Your latest communication unhappily confirms what we have for some time suspected: that you are suffering from the delusions of a foolish, infatuated female. How can you otherwise sup-

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pose that a lady who has chanced to stand below your window in the vicinity of the art gallery on one or two occasions has "designs" on the owner, even if he were "the most eligible man in London"? Clear your mind of such nonsense and attend to the horticultural interests we have been at such pains to foster.

April 1885

It is with profound regret and a deep sense of shock that we announce the death of Miss Gertrude Smyth, who edited our *Answers to Correspondents* since this journal was founded seven years ago. Miss Smyth was the victim last month of a singularly unfortunate and distressing accident in Chelsea, when she was struck on the head by a brass flower-pot that fell from an upper window ledge. Miss Smyth's sagacious and authoritative advice was of the greatest service to myriads of our readers. Out of respect for her memory, we are publishing no *Answers to Correspondents* this month. The column will be resumed in our next issue.

May 1885

Arabella. We can see no impediment to your being married in September in Paris.

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a *NEW* short story by

M. F. K. FISHER

After attending a variety of schools in California and Illinois, M. F. K. Fisher spent three years in France at the University of Dijon. Her first book, Serve It Forth, *was published in 1937 and established her as a gastronomer and writer of note. W. H. Auden said of her, "I do not know of anyone in the United States today who writes better prose."*

We're very pleased to welcome M. F. K. Fisher to our pages again, and to recommend her new collection of short stories, Sister Age, *recently published by Knopf . . .*

THE YOUNG WEATHERMAN

by M. F. K. FISHER

I was talking with Dirk Holcomb, up from Landgrant, our county seat, to see his old friend Tom Meadows. Tom was the young meteorologist whose cabin was nearest to mine, about a half hour's ride away. Dirk's Landrover was parked down on the county road, and my mare Lucy stood patiently under the big pine by the cabin, still saddled from the ride up to Tom's place.

I poured a second mug of coffee for each of us, and added a good slug of bourbon to Dirk's, but held off on my own. The bottle was getting low, and it would be another three weeks before I rode down to Landgrant again, for supplies.

"Yeah," Dirk said. "I've never known anyone as dedicated as Tom to the job. He's built up the best weather service in this whole damned territory, for quick honest stuff about what to expect, tomorrow or next week—wind, sleet, all that."

"I saw him yesterday, you know," I said. Dirk seemed like a nice

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young fellow, easy to talk with, the kind who didn't mind silences, either. "He's got all that shortwave stuff up there. I guess every rancher within five hundred miles around, maybe more, can pick him up and listen, and even talk back. It's good for us loners."

Dirk laughed shortly. "Too bad not to use it on plain townspeople," he said, and I looked my question at him.

"He's got a good wife waiting, and his folks too, right there in town," he said impatiently. "But all he ever wanted was to come up to this—this godforsaken, lonely mountain! Two years now!"

He set his mug down hard, and then looked ruefully at me. "Too much of your good coffee, eh? I'm talking too much. But why'd he just walk out on Helen Mary? She's the prettiest girl you'd ever see. And his mother and father are—well, salt of the earth, good, god-fearing, all right-well-educated. Maybe a little strict, but *good*."

After a bit I said, "What about Helen Mary, then?"

He rubbed his head angrily and took a long swig of his cooling coffee. "She's making out all right," he said in a suddenly surly voice, and then he grinned a little. "No use trying to talk her into getting onto the shortwave trick, though, and the loneliness up here. Too late for that. She's stubborn as hell. But she'll make out all right."

"Yesterday Tom seemed all up in the air—really high, I almost said—about his new weather show. Said he'd sent a full outline and schedule to the state broadcasting people, with a lot of support from local ranchers. It sounded fine to me. Of course, I've given him all the help I could, although our places are pretty far apart. My God, what that program would do to help ranchers around here! Especially in the winter and early spring. And miners.

"Well, he was waiting for an answer, and seemed all fired up."

Dirk drained his mug, and headed for the cabin door. "Thanks, sir, for lending me your mare," he said without turning around. "Yeah, I was bringing him the mail to okay it. He was all fired up, all right. But he let the fire go out."

The Landrover drove off. I went out to unsaddle Lucy, and thought about the cold dark cabin up the mountain and Tom's body dangling there from the rafter, waiting for his friend to cut down, and the letters lying on the floor. I began to wonder, about winds, and women, and all that.

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a *NEW* short story by

JANWILLEM van de WETERING

"All rules need to be broken at times," Victor Verburg told the Dutch journalist who was interviewing him at the estate on the coast of Maine where Verburg lived with his wife—a calm, beautiful woman he met in South America. Verburg himself was also Dutch, "a lean, tall man . . . a scholarly rustic with kind brown eyes and a scraggly moustache."

Have you ever met Netherlander Janwillem van de Wetering, or seen him? Did you know that he and his wife live in Maine and that she is calm and beautiful and that they met in South America? . . .

A TASTY TIDBIT

by JANWILLEM van de WETERING

As a journalist, stationed in my home country, the Netherlands, where I work for a magazine, I often have to travel to the States. My last assignment, some months ago now, was the usual assortment of very different fish—a religious society in the deep South supposedly making use of deadly snakes (whoever enjoys true enlightenment doesn't get bitten), a corrupt senator willing to grant an interview, a Dutch professor who explained biological computers in his New York laboratory, and a Dutch writer who lived high up on the East Coast.

One shouldn't expect too much from shallow articles illustrated with glossy photographs—at the very best they may distract patients in dentists' waiting rooms—so if I say the results were disappointing, I only mean the final results. What I really experience is worth the

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trouble. But I can never express my true feelings, which leads to continuous frustration.

Those idiots with their copperheads and rattlesnakes, for instance. What a marvelous show they put on, complete with a true black necromancer, jungle drums, nude young female meditators—how beautiful. And the slimy senator, that sympathetic parasite. And the delicious old know-it-all in New York who really thinks he is *growing* computers—the multicolored interconnected worms he showed me through his electronic microscope are still in my dreams. Each interview would supply more than enough material for a novel, but I'm only a piecemeal writer, not a true author—like the fourth contact I made on that American trip, the Netherlands-born "thriller" writer, Victor Verburg.

I found him available, via a telephone call to his estate on the Maine coast, and he was kind enough to pick me up at the airport. A lean, tall man with only a touch of bulge above the belt, a scholarly rustic with kind brown eyes and a scraggly moustache, affecting a modest attitude, although he is well known—or, rather, he was. The reading public forgets quickly. Which was the reason for looking him up—he hasn't been published for a while now.

"Why don't you write any more, Victor?" I asked in the car. (He put us on a first-name basis right away.)

"Well—" he had a pleasant, hoarse voice "—I have other interests these days."

He explained his recent activities, while the car—a long low convertible that gave me the feeling of riding on whipped cream—slid through a freshly green landscape. He said he had asked himself, once he was well established on the international market, whether he should go on. The motivation of money is limited; after a certain amount one has all that is needed. He was spending his time now on boating and study, and in his home I found a respectable library on subjects ranging from the technical origin of life through pure abstract philosophy.

His home, a large wooden structure on a low hill with a view of the sea, was surrounded by balconies and verandas, all at the center of gardens flowing toward the sea—wavy fields carrying a crop of silver-colored plants. His wife, Victor told me, was an authority on herbs. She wasn't around—it seemed she traveled a lot, searching for rare flora.

I stayed a few days. American distances are too enormous to allow

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for arriving and leaving on the same day, and Verburg was a perfect host. He was a gourmet cook himself but also knew all the good eating places in the neighborhood. He poured tasty but strong drinks and would talk at length but also knew how to be quiet. We went for walks and the second day he took me out in his motorboat.

The coast there consists of bays and peninsulas. My own hobby is scuba diving and Victor owned a number of complete sets of equipment. Together we dived near some large rocks where a herd of seals was sunning itself. Victor seemed to know some of them well and several young males welcomed us and accompanied us on our journey.

It took a while to get used to the rather muddy water, but I soon began to see mysteriously waving reeds, flashing bodies of cod and mackerel, brilliant jellyfish pumping themselves forward in their bizarre manner, and the subtle sepia colors of the bay's irregular bottom. We swam further and further, exploring large caves.

Then suddenly the mood changed. I didn't understand my sudden fear. The veiled light hadn't changed. Plants and fish continued their ballet. Lobsters waved their antennae and claws. But I felt threatened and seemed to be listening to the somber music of demons playing the double bass and hitting kettle drums with wrapped sticks. I couldn't see Victor but two of the seals were with me, flapping their short forepaws nervously. We had just reached another cave, larger and deeper than the others. Rocks covered with algae were set around the entrance and I thought I saw the white glistening of an enormous smooth body inside. I started inside but the seals got in my way and pushed me back.

The oxygen in my cylinders was getting low and so I floated up. Victor was waiting for me. He smiled at me from the boat and helped me aboard.

I told him about the cave and the seals' strange behavior. He nodded. "Yes, I didn't know we had strayed this far. A shark lives in there."

"I didn't think sharks would bother us in such cold waters."

"You're right," Victor said, "sharks are okay up here, but they still lust after flesh and the great white shark is the most dangerous of the lot. He won't hurt you, but he may forget himself. And this particular fellow is an especially large example of the species."

"The two of you have met?" I asked.

He started his almost soundless engine and the small boat lifted

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its slender bow and began to chop at the little waves, picking up speed until we planed effortlessly on the smooth surface of the bay, hardly disturbed by a soft breeze. The freshly foaming wake stretched far behind us.

"The shark and I are well acquainted," Victor told me. "He's a true giant, some thirty feet long, with wicked teeth in his evil head. But he isn't a bad chap once you get to know him. He must be quite old. I think he has retired in that cave. I never see him near the other shore of the bay, so he must be living on whatever happens to stray within his reach here."

I forgot the shark and that evening on Victor's veranda we awaited the arrival of a full moon while sipping cognac and smoking cigars. The temperature had dropped and Victor lit the pile of debris we had gathered that morning. The largest part of his estate is covered by a forest of pines and firs and he collects the dead wood and branches so that the carpet of reddish needles may remain undisturbed.

We watched the flames that made the cognac in our glasses sparkle and I remembered that I should be asking questions. "Don't you mind losing your following?" I said.

Verburg's was an unusual career. He lived on all the continents during the early part of his life, buying and selling irregular goods. Later on, he owned his own firm in Amsterdam but migrated to America when his books began to sell. He only wrote for some seven years, but his work was well accepted and his fame spread quickly. Some years ago he was interviewed regularly, spoke on talk shows on both sides of the Atlantic, had his own column in several newspapers, and published short stories in the better magazines. Then it all came to an end.

Victor raised his glass and laughed. The light from the bonfire made his silhouette glow. "Fame? What will that do for me? Writing was a pleasurable pastime and the profit still supports me, but I've reached the last part of my life. Isn't it time to spend my mature years on something more worthwhile? I'm studying at the local university, I observe whatever interests me. Lately I've been having a good time attempting to comprehend Einstein's ideas on relativity. The universe is fascinating, even in the dark corner that is reserved for us. Having a following distracts me from my curiosity. I don't want to waste any more time courting applause."

"Do you know a lot of people here?" I asked.

He shook his head. "And I don't want to. It's not hard to make

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friends here, but once you do, they gobble you up. I prefer to be a hermit."

"Am I the exception?"

He drained his glass and the silence crept back between us. His large brown eyes avoided mine. "All rules need to be broken at times, and the prospect of a visitor from my own country—I am homesick maybe." He smiled as if he wanted to excuse a weakness.

I relaxed and Verburg seemed to, too. The glasses filled themselves again, the pile burned brightly, and the moon floated majestically above bay and woods.

"Fame," Victor said, pulling his chair closer to mine, "is a nuisance, especially when it attacks you through female seduction. When a man gets older, he likes to feel he's still in it." He took a long swallow from his drink. "Some years ago there was a girl here—"

The information reaching me was unsuitable for the chatty level of my magazine's articles, but I kept quiet and listened.

"My wife was ajourneying again," Victor said. "She does have to go after her plants, and—"

I had looked through the photo album in his study and seen pictures of his wife. A most beautiful woman—slender, calm, exotic. Victor said he had met Eleia in South America. She was still on this side of middle age, a handsome woman, looking a little like Raquel Welch but somewhat darker, and with luminous eyes.

"Eleia was on a trip," Victor said, "and a girl telephoned me, a girl from the Netherlands with a dear voice. She said she had read everything that I ever wrote, was completely captured by the content and style of my work, and—well, you know that sort of approach. The most welcome type of fan mail, but alive and attainable. She was staying close by, on one of the islands here." He pointed. "I can reach it within an hour by boat. You can see the island if you stand on the roof. The girl was by herself, had to caretake somebody's house, didn't know what to do with herself, found my name in the telephone book, decided to call me, and hoped she wasn't disturbing me."

"An open invitation?" I asked.

"I didn't respond," Victor said. "I'm not that crazy. Eleia is rather jealous. To invite a young female here when she was away, wouldn't that be asking for trouble?"

"You went to fetch her."

Victor sighed, "How weak is man—how strong his desire. Not that

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I intended to, of course. I was just going for a little trip, as I so often do, and happened to get close to the island. And then felt like going even closer, to see if the kelp was doing well near the shore—"

"And there she was, displaying her lovely form on a rock."

"How do you know?" Victor asked.

I smiled.

"Indeed, on a rock. Such a lovely girl. Some twenty-three years old, exactly the right age. I allowed the boat to nose close to her and she never hesitated, she jumped aboard."

"She recognized you? Ah, your photograph is on your books."

"Yes, but she seemed surprised all the same. She kept saying I looked so young."

"And so you do," I said. "The life here must agree with you."

"The girl was flattering me, kept babbling about my virile good looks, saying she would never have thought of telephoning me if she'd known how much I attracted her."

I grinned.

"Yes, you can laugh. Little mistakes go a long way. My last published story appeared in an anthology gathered by a disorganized genius. Each story showed the birth year of the author and in my case he was ten years out, so the girl thought I was in my sixties."

"Poor little thing."

"Smart little thing," Victor said, "with an excellent act. I ate the apple and headed for home."

"Some sexual activity?"

"After the walk across the estate, we were at each other and never stopped. She was like an unmeasurable pit and I kept falling into her without ever reaching bottom. Whatever she gave me seemed only a beginning."

"A tasty tidbit." I grinned and held up my glass. The bottle was empty and Victor staggered into the house. We had a good go at the second bottle while he told all.

The affair was idyllic. Holding hands, artist and muse trotted through the woods. They went sailing together and raced the motorboat. She learned scuba diving and the two explored the inlet's romantic depths. He read his unpublished poetry to her and she was moved to tears. ("My rhymes make my wife sick to her stomach," Victor said, "and rightly so.") The girl got on well with the seals and helped him weed the herb gardens. She taught him new recipes. She was always cheerful. Her youthful energy kindled his own. ("My wife doesn't believe in overspending ourselves," Victor said.)

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"Real love, eh?"

"I thought so for a little while."

"You wanted to marry her?"

"The frenzy got worse and worse. After a few days, I told her I couldn't live without her. I proposed lengthy journeys. I always wanted to go to New Guinea, to study primitive masks, and what do you know, that was exactly what she wanted to do. We seemed to be made for each other."

"Are you very rich?" I asked.

"She must have been interested in my wealth. But she never asked about money. She said she was a nurse and earning a fair salary."

"Did you promise her any presents?"

Victor nodded sadly. "She said she liked small sports cars and I immediately offered to buy her one. She also wanted to learn how to fly. I said that she could become a member of the local flying club and I would give her an airplane as soon as she had her papers."

"You never saw through the magnificent soap bubble?"

The liquor had lamed the muscles of his lips and he suddenly looked like an old clown. "My wife was due to return and the girl was still around. One morning I was brushing my teeth on the balcony and realized the stupidity of the whole thing. I knew I had struck nonsense again. She had to go, as soon as possible."

"And didn't go."

"No."

"And you were too much the gentleman to push her out."

"No. Men are rather weak, don't you think? Are you any good at breaking relationships?"

"Not at all," I said helpfully.

"Good. Neither am I. Eleia came back and I introduced the two. She saw through the situation in half a second, took me aside, and asked me what I wanted. I told her to be rid of her."

"Of who? Your wife?"

He gave me a surprised look. "Are you all right in the head? The girl, of course. I love Eleia. To grow old together, can there by anything more beautiful than that?"

"So then what?"

"Eleia knows how to take care of situations," said Victor, wiping at a cognac stain on his shirt. He wanted to break off his story but I held on.

"No, finish the tale. What happened to the girl?"

Victor gazed at the bay below. "She's still there."

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"*What?*"

"Her body cells must have been absorbed by those of the shark."

I was on my feet. "Did you feed her to the shark?"

"Not me," Victor said.

"Who?"

He kept quiet.

"Did she visit the old shark by herself?"

Victor turned his attention to the dying fire. "Not with me, didn't I say so just now? I once gave the shark a dead seal. I found the carcass on the rocks and thought the shark would appreciate the gift. I was right. Chop chop chop. That crazy animal really has a nasty mouth. Sharks devour carrion and they go after blood. Once you're wounded you have to be careful. But when you're in one piece you can safely visit him—I've often done it. He'll come to greet me and push his flank against my leg. Why don't you join me tomorrow and see?"

"Not on your life," I said, and waited.

In time, Victor continued. "The girl stayed, and so did Eleia and I, of course. A ménage à trois in a way, although the girl and I didn't sleep together any more. Her presence became irritating."

"Your wife must be very good at scuba diving, too," I said. "Am I right?"

"The county's champion," Victor said proudly. "Eleia's won first prize for five years in a row. She used to be a dancer and knows how to control her body."

"So your wife took the guest along on a swim," I said, "and happened to wound her once they were submerged—with her knife, I imagine. You gave me a knife when we were diving. I strapped it to my leg. Eleia must have scratched the girl and then took her to the shark's cave. Chop chop chop."

"It may have happened that way," Victor said.

"You're not sure?"

He made an effort to smile. "Eleia came back alone and we've never discussed the matter."

I woke up the next morning with a terrible hangover, treated by Victor with strong coffee, some aspirin, and orange juice. He dropped me off at the airport. I didn't remind him of the previous evening's conversation. Authors live in a world of fantasy. I understood that he had come up with a horror story to amuse me.

A few days ago, an acquaintance I met in a café mentioned hol-

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idaying in the United States. I said that the world is becoming less safe by the day—only North America can be trusted. When you leave, you know you will return on the appointed day. My acquaintance disagreed. A girl he knew had left but never come back. I asked for details.

The girl was a nurse who had been babysitting someone's house on an island off the coast of Maine. When the owner of the house eventually returned, the girl was nowhere to be found.

"What happened?" I asked. "Was she out swimming and caught by the currents?"

"Her baggage was still in the house," my friend said. "She may have slipped off the rocks or gone under while swimming, but according to the U.S. Coast Guard drowned persons are invariably found. Nobody found *her.*"

What can I do—press charges? Without any proof, I'll make a fool of myself. I still see Victor Verburg, telling the tale during that drunken evening, with a wood pile burning brightly and a soft white moon sailing slowly above land- and seascape. I understand now why he stopped writing. All his work is motivated by and based on fear, the fear of fantasy. That time he must have come too close to reality.

I wonder if he still visits the shark, in that greenish-black cavity fifteen feet below the cheerful little white waves of his peaceful bay.

"Q"

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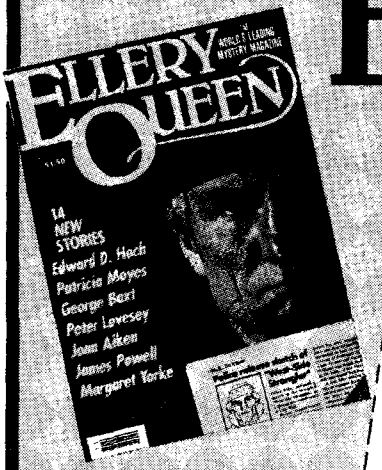

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a *NEW* short story by

JOHN C. BOLAND

The hijacking had made a brief splash in the newspapers. Three gunmen had taken the courier in the Brooker, Finn customer's underground garage. Besides the bearer bonds, the messenger was carrying more than a million dollars' worth of common-stock certificates. Compared to the money that moves around the financial district in satchels every day, the load was small potatoes. But except for the stock certificates, it was all as untraceable as cash.

John Boland writes as tough a narrative as any hard-boiled detective story we've ever read all the way through. and his stories about Wall Street are among his very best . . .

EASY MONEY

by JOHN C. BOLAND

The client was one of the big brokers down on Broad Street. From one corner of the fourteenth-floor office, I could see the columned entrance of the New York Stock Exchange; from another glass wall, a glimpse of the harbor, where gusts of November rain made the Statue of Liberty seem to shimmy and sway. The symbolism was stirring: liberty and wealth, virtue and its reward.

A senior vice-president, Luke Haroldson, had brought me in to meet his boss. "George Finn is an impressive guy—you'll like him, Ben." He called me Ben because we had run into each other at parties. We stood scuffing our feet on oriental carpets and admiring porcelain lamps while George Finn, the chairman of Brooker, Finn Investment Bankers, attended to other affairs of state. His secretary came out and gave a small bow. We were admitted.

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George Finn had inherited his empire but seemed to be taking good care of it. His firm catered to professional investors and overseas clients, blue chip and big ticket all the way.

Hunching forward, Finn looked like a large white bear, paws folded decorously on his desk. His features contrasted with his bulk. They were small and sharp, almost elfin.

"Sit down, Mr. Kavanaugh," he boomed. "Three million—that's the loss. Our insurers have balked. They say we violated some footnote in our coverage. Luke here was in charge of overseeing that stuff."

Luke here withered.

"If you can recover, the bounty is ten percent," Finn went on. "Meanwhile, retainer, expenses, and an open door. It's been five months, so I'm not very optimistic."

Haroldson, a tall Ivy Leaguer with thinning yellow curls, tried to redeem himself. "Ben turned up some of that General Motors stock two years ago, George."

Finn ignored him. "Let's be clear, Mr. Kavanaugh. We normally don't do much business in bearer bonds. If a good customer wants to buy them, however, we comply."

Getting them delivered to the good customer's office in Newark was where Brooker, Finn tripped up. The hijacking had made a brief splash in the newspapers. Three gunmen had taken the courier in the customer's underground garage. Besides the bearer bonds, the messenger was carrying more than a million dollars' worth of common-stock certificates. Compared to the money that moves around the financial district in satchels every day, the load was small potatoes. But except for the stock certificates, it was all as untraceable as cash.

Haroldson was trembling in the elevator. "Have you had lunch, Ben? I'll fill you in." We elbowed our way down the street to the Exchange Place Grille. It's popular because behind the bar a steady stream of stock prices rolls across a lighted board. You can drink to your prosperity or drink to forget.

"You know how these things happen, Ben," he said. "You were a broker."

"I never dealt in bearer bonds," I told him. Whether they're issued in Deutschemarks, yen, or good old Yankee dollars, they've got a common selling point. They're not registered to any owner. Interest and principal payments are handed over to anyone who presents the

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coupons and the certificates. If you're a European in a lofty tax bracket, or if your fortune flows from some high-margin venture such as wholesaling cocaine, the hiding of wealth is as necessary as doing Alsace in the spring.

"It was embarrassing when word got out," he said glumly. "We kept a lid on the worst parts."

He meant parts like the fact that a two-year employee of Brooker, Finn's back office, Larry Fuller, had quit his job two days before the heist, telling his supervisor he was moving to California.

After five months, the case wasn't at the top of the FBI's priority list. If the insurance company hadn't dug in its heels, it wouldn't have been high on George Finn's list.

Haroldson ordered a second Bloody Mary. The prices from the stock board marched across his glasses like an army of angry ants.

In my four years as a broker and six as a security consultant, I'd never got to know the Brooker, Finn crowd well. Haroldson and I recognized each other from boozy Christmas lunches at the Exchange or from occasional securities-dealers functions. George Finn was one of the legendary eminences who seldom turned up for elbow-rubbing with the Street's wage earners. His predecessor as chairman, the firm's founder, Emmett Gladstone Brooker, occupied a wheelchair in a nice place upstate where a nurse could hold a drool cup while the ancient mind retraced shorts squeezed till they screamed, corners brilliantly executed, and enemies who had grinned in triumph as they bought gold-plated bricks.

"Who was the customer?" I said.

"Francis Chapman. He's a contractor. Politically connected over in Jersey. We've done business with him for about a year."

"How much have you socked away for him in bearer bonds?"

Haroldson turned and stared at me. "I don't like that tone." He swallowed from his drink. "Mr. Chapman generally invests in computer stocks. Sometimes we invite him to participate in venture financings."

"Could Chapman have hijacked his own bonds?"

His long face dropped. "Not a chance! He was furious. We stonewalled his name to the press, but the FBI had to know."

And what the FBI knows, the Internal Revenue Service can find out.

"Mr. Finn is furious, too. This hasn't helped our name."

"I can dig it," I said. Brokers don't want to get reputations as pushovers for holdup men.

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We went back to Haroldson's office. His secretary made me copies of the case file. "There's not much on Fuller," he apologized. "He said he was a veteran, but we've found out he had a dishonorable discharge. His wife ran off last year. You can talk to Ms. Battaglia."

We stopped by the trading room, an array of flashing quote boards, computer terminals, and plugged-in young men and women who chattered into telephones in a clipped code to strike deals with other traders as nearby as Pine Street or as distant as Tokyo. Haroldson nodded at nothing. "We're making money today."

Ms. Battaglia, the personnel director, was a bright young woman two years out of Columbia who believed that Mr. Fuller had been addressing his problems. "He was still dissociating—that's because of the marital trauma—but he had begun planning for the future. The move to California was a big step in realigning his life."

Haroldson looked ill. I thumbed through my copy of the file and found Larry Fuller's personnel packet. He was thin-faced, brown-haired, stubble-cheeked, and in the photo he wore a fatigue jacket.

"I guess you haven't gotten in touch with him in California?" I asked.

She pouted. "The FBI says he probably didn't go to California."

"He knew the routine on courier packages?"

She managed to look embarrassed. "He scheduled them."

I wasted the afternoon talking to Larry Fuller's supervisor, who claimed never to have trusted him—"Unstable, unpredictable," he announced—and waiting at the Newark Mercantile Building for the insurance investigator who'd handled the case.

Jim Waldbaum was young, good-looking, and smelled of cologne. "You're plowing old ground, but the best of luck to you. We found that Fuller had two buddies—losers like him—who dropped out of sight the same week he did. LeRoy Martel and James Bedloe. They were working odd jobs out at the ball park. The courier couldn't give much of a description, because they wore ski masks, but what we've got fits those three. The FBI hasn't found hide nor hair of any of them."

"What can you tell me about Francis Chapman?"

"Me, nothing. The Bureau passed a little along. You can probably guess what kind of guy buys bearer bonds in three-million-dollar lots."

"A guy like a contractor?"

He gave me a weak smile. "Try laundry man. The skim from

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Vegas or Atlantic City has to go somewhere. Bearer bonds float around Europe and the Caribbean like a green blizzard. Did Brooker, Finn tell you his bonds were in German marks?"

"No. Nice to know the mob can hedge against the dollar, too."

For a week, I kicked along the row Jim Waldbaum and the FBI had plowed, hoping the old dung hid a diamond. It didn't. I stayed away from Francis Chapman & Co., cashed Brooker, Finn's $5,000 retainer check, and took my wife on a long weekend to the Bahamas. For some reason I didn't call Luke Haroldson and ask if he knew any good stocks to buy.

I came back to New York and concentrated on work that promised to pay more than a retainer. Pro forma, I put out lines to the West Coast and got back nothing. I telexed affiliate security firms in the Midwest and the South and got back nothing. The ground had swallowed up Larry Fuller and his two friends. It had swallowed up the bearer bonds. Periodically, I called Luke Haroldson or his secretary and reported I had nothing to report. Bucketing the case didn't cost me sleep. Brooker, Finn hadn't told me all they should have about Chapman.

Once or twice a month, I dug out Waldbaum's card and asked him if he'd heard anything. In December and January, he hadn't. In February, he asked idly if I'd seen the Sunday newspapers.

Marge and I were just back from St. Kitts. I hemmed. "Been out on a job."

"The mob decided it could get a new laundry man. Francis Chapman took a shotgun in the face Saturday night. Just across the street from here, at the rail station."

"What do you figure?"

"Stock prices have been falling. I figure they were sore about their losses."

I chuckled along with him. Every investment adviser's dream: a disgruntled customer with a shotgun.

"Maybe they hadn't known he was buying bearer bonds," I said. "He might have had the computer-stock franchise."

"And bearer bonds were a tipoff he was skimming? If so, they've known it for eight months," Waldbaum said. "But you could be right. It's more fun if you let a man think he's safe before you chop him."

Luke Haroldson met me for lunch. He chewed celery sticks like

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a nervous rabbit. "I don't think we knew what kind of people we were dealing with," he complained.

Sure you did, I thought, the kind with green money.

Chapman's murder made someone else nervous. Two days later, Haroldson called. "Somebody in Chicago tried to pass one of the stock certificates the messenger lost. It sounds like it could have been Larry Fuller."

"Have you called the Bureau?"

"We're not policemen. Mr. Finn just wants the bonds back."

"Okay." I hung up, shook my head. Before the line got cold, I rang Waldbaum and filled him in. "Want to go to Chicago?"

"Why? My firm's off the hook. We cancelled Brooker, Finn. The weather's awful out there."

Mr. Crutcher was a senior broker at Belknap, Dore, and Porter, and it wasn't the first time he'd been offered stolen securities. "I looked at the certificates, and I looked at the young man, and I didn't even have to check the registration numbers against the list," he boasted.

I showed him the photograph of Larry Fuller. "Is this the man?"

"Of course." He peered nearsightedly. "The young man was just testing the waters. The stocks he wanted to sell were worth only about fifty thousand. And the subject of bearer bonds didn't come up. I did my best to string him along. I told him it would take a day or two before we could complete the transaction, and he should return. But he hasn't."

Crutcher had shared Haroldson's instinct that scandal was best kept in the family. Instead of phoning the police, he had called Brooker, Finn in New York.

If Fuller was disgorging some of the loot, he had to be desperate. I hung around Chicago broker's offices for three days, hoping to pick up the trail. When I did, it was at a ritzy shop that hadn't bothered to check the registration numbers. They had taken the shares in trade. The managing director was profusely apologetic, so I didn't ask him how much of a discount they had demanded. He reciprocated my cooperative spirit.

"Mr. Wrather is due to pick up his check this afternoon." Wrather was the name in which the stock was registered.

"Give it to him with a straight face," I said.

The kid had improved his looks. He had traded in the khakis for

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a tweed jacket and gray slacks, which made me think he had moved more of the securities at another shop. I picked him up on the street late in the afternoon, as February light was bleeding up the sides of Golden Mile skyscrapers.

Tagging him six blocks to his hotel was the easiest job I'd had in months. He bounced along with the jaunty air of a young man who has come into a fortune—and isn't being hunted. If he imagined three million in bearer bonds would be forgotten, his brain must have melted.

I made friends with hotel security and shook down his car. There were a couple of receipts from Chicago parking garages a day or two old and a dozen unpaid parking tickets from a downstate town named Kewanee. They ranged from a week to six months' old.

When Fuller went down to the restaurant at six-thirty, I turned over his room. In the closet was an oxblood attaché case containing a handful of common-stock certificates. I added up the shares, guessed what the stocks were selling for, and came up with a few hundred thousand dollars.

So far I had found about five percent of the booty. Discouraging but not surprising.

There were several possibilities. He and his friends could have split the take three ways and dispersed. In that case, I was going to have to settle for a third of what I wanted. Just as possible, his two buddies were sitting on the poke down in Kewanee.

Either way, Larry Fuller didn't have much on him. If I took him now, I would have to pry the location of his hideaway loose and there was a chance he wouldn't give.

I paid the hotel security chief for a room down the hall. For another hundred, he sent an assistant out to Michigan Avenue to buy a small battery-powered radio transmitter and receiver. After supper I played with them, then stashed the transmitter on Fuller's car.

I stayed clear of the kid. The following afternoon, security called. "He's checking out."

He took his time, and we got to Kewanee near dusk. For the last five miles, I drove without lights along an oiled road. Larry Fuller turned in past a battered mailbox. A gravel road stretched far back among the fields. His taillights winked a half mile ahead, where I could pick out a white house and a barn hunching under a broad empty sky.

I found a motel ten miles back toward town and got a sound night's

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sleep. The next morning, I unpacked a revolver I had never fired, loaded it, and drove back to the farm. I tried counting by hundreds to three million and couldn't reach the first million. Somewhere around two thousand hundred, I lost track. It was a lot of money. I tried division and found that three million dollars is spending money of two hundred a day for fifteen thousand days, or forty-one years. I had turned forty-two in January and didn't expect to live to eighty-three.

Larry Fuller woke up when I shook his shoulder. The sight of the gun made him compliant as I tied him to a kitchen chair. Compliant but not talkative. I finally gave up and ripped the bedroom apart. I found three shotguns, a stack of superhero comic books, and a batch of stock certificates. No bearer bonds.

Not finding the bonds took all the sums I'd been doing down to zero. That was where they belonged.

I asked about his friends, LeRoy Martel and James Bedloe. He got a little wide-eyed but kept his mouth shut.

I shook the house down lightly, then went outside for fresh air. The barn lay a hundred feet down a frozen mud track at the edge of a stumpy field that looked like it stretched all the way to Nebraska.

I opened the door and wondered only afterward whether I was walking into a shotgun. There wasn't one. Neither Farmer MacDonald nor Larry Fuller had it in for trespassers. Larry's buddies hadn't staked out the hayloft. The cow stalls were empty. There was a small mound of dung in one corner and a big mound of hay in another. A tin bucket and a three-quarters-empty bag of crop-dusting chemicals lay on their sides.

Pale light from the doorway found something faintly gleaming in the haystack. As soon as I looked a second time, it was obvious. The mound had settled since being thrown together, and the shape of the automobile had melted outward, like a sculpture emerging in stone.

I kicked and brushed dry grass away from the driver's door. Through the dusty window, the driver grinned at me. He'd been working on the grin since late summer and couldn't hold it back. I left the door closed but brushed enough dust away to see that he had a friend who enjoyed Larry Fuller's jest as well. I decided to leave it to the coroner to determine the cause of their merriment.

I glanced around the barn. Maybe the bearer bonds were sitting at the feet of Martel and Bedloe. Maybe they were in the back seat or the trunk. I wasn't going to discover them. I walked out of the

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barn and took a deep breath. If Larry Fuller had been babysitting his two friends all these months, I could dig his wild looks. When the wind picked up, they might call to him, "Hey, pal, it's cold out here under the hay."

I was on the porch step when the car revved its engine turning in from the highway. I dipped into my coat pocket, held the revolver beside my leg, and waited. I hadn't called anyone.

It was Jim Waldbaum. He parked a green Maverick behind my car and climbed out, blowing a column of fog into the icy morning.

He waved to me across the top of the car. "This place is hell to reach."

"You've been tailing me."

"Yes—yes, I have." He dipped back into the car and brought out an automatic rifle. He set it on the car roof, not quite aiming it. "If we shoot it out, you'll lose. So let go of your gun. We can work something out."

I didn't think so, but the porch was wide open. I threw the gun into the yard.

Waldbaum came into the open. A freezing breeze cut through my jacket, lifted his black hair. "Where's the kid?" He called toward the house. *"Fuller! Hey!"* Turning his attention back to me, he said, "That's a lot of dough. I wondered if you'd decide to keep it."

"I didn't find it."

He scowled, and I asked, "Are you working for yourself or for Chapman's bosses?"

He stood below me. "Nobody owns me. I started thinking about that much money, that's all. I started and I couldn't stop." His pupils were like black holes. He was going to kill me.

He went into the house. Fuller had tipped over the kitchen chair and was straining against the clothesline. Waldbaum made me set him upright. He stepped back and slammed the rifle across Fuller's cheek.

Fuller stared at him and giggled.

Waldbaum told him what he wanted. Fuller sucked in his lips. "Ask LeRoy—he knows."

Waldbaum took me out to the barn. He peered through the car windows, laughed drily. "Key's in the ignition. Pop the trunk."

When I opened the driver's door, rotten air whumped out like gas from the bottom of a swamp. I reached past a sunken chest and pulled the onyx key baub.

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The trunk was empty. He had me shake down the inside of the car, under the front seats. I pulled out the back seat. Waldbaum was sweating.

We walked back to the house. It was mid-morning now, and icy pellets of snow pelted the mud ruts.

I could see Larry through the neglected curtains, sitting in the chair. I walked in and stepped to the side, and Larry fired the shotgun. The blast pushed Waldbaum through the doorway and off the porch, heels kicking the sky. I dived at an angle through the door, vaulted the rail, and retreated to the side of the house.

Fuller came onto the porch. Waldbaum was twisting on the ground. Fuller fired another blast into his back.

As a car door clicked open, I risked a peek through the lattice work. Larry Fuller pocketed the keys to Waldbaum's Maverick. He looked around, chin high, blue eyes searching for movement among the stubby corn stalks. "Guess if I was a chicken, I'd hide behind the house," he said loudly.

Wildly, I glanced behind me, but the land was open, flat—frost-specked field for a quarter mile to the first windbreak. I'd make as good a target as any farm boy hunting rabbits ever had.

He came around the same way I had, circling wide. I ducked around the corner in a hurry, then almost waited too long before retreating to the next corner. He ran and suddenly came into view fifteen yards across the thick grass. He snapped off a blast that ripped the siding as I ducked into cover.

I heard the thump-thump of running. This time I was around the next side before he got his angle. When I reached the front of the house, I listened but couldn't hear him.

He could be circling back. He could be creeping along close to the building, and when he stuck the barrel around the corner I'd feel the load of shot before realizing I saw him.

I crouched. I could see Waldbaum's foot. His rifle had landed on the porch. He had my pistol in his pocket.

When Fuller attacked, it was from just overhead. It hadn't occurred to me he might enter the back of the house. The explosion of glass and ripping pellets scythed down, clipping my scalp. I hit the stiff grass. The gun blasted, the balls of frozen earth rained. The bathroom window was four feet overhead, just above the tub: small, constricted. I got up and ran.

I went straight away from the house, down toward the barn. When I was debating my chances of making the blind side of the barn

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rather than the door, I looked back and saw Larry Fuller strolling across the yard. The door it was.

But that was the end. The hay wouldn't shield me. And Larry's friends wouldn't like somebody bloody climbing into the car with them.

I dug the car key out of my pocket. Grabbing the almost empty bag of crop-dusting chemicals, I jerked open the driver's door. I reached a leg in, almost sitting on the grinning guy's lap. The battery, after eight months of sitting, cranked the engine like a champ.

"Hey, man, what's that?"

The engine roared, choked a few times, seemed about to die, then roared again.

"Hey, man!"

I jammed the chemicals bag down on the footfeed, brushed a stained pantleg aside, planted my foot on the brake, and dropped the car into second gear.

"You can't drive out with my buddies! I'm gonna blow your head off!"

When I saw the barn door start to move, I eased off the brake and let the car slide away from me, giving the car door a push shut.

"Hey!"

The car rolled ahead slowly, thumping across the board floor, shedding hay from its dusty fenders.

He appeared in the doorway and stared straight at the grinning man behind the steering wheel. "Hey, LeRoy, you ain't—"

Through the greyed window, I saw the corpse lean forward across the steering wheel, nodding. Fuller howled, fired a blast through the windshield, and then roared again at his grinning friends. The car brushed him gently aside as it plowed through the rotted wall and bounced into the field. Twenty yards later it stalled.

Larry Fuller started to walk after it when I banged him on the head with the tin bucket. Something scooted past my foot, tumbling on the wind, and I grabbed it. It was high-grade paper, denominated in German marks, chewed on one corner by rats or field mice. Others walked after it, flashing green, from the ragged gap in the barn's double wall.

Two hundred dollars a day for forty-one years. I picked up Larry's shotgun. The barrel was hot, the air was frigid, and the sky was dirty with snow.

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The author of EQMM "first story" #610, Donna Bell, has a varied background in the advertising media, including radio, newspaper, and advertising-agency work. She says she had thought making a living commercially would hinder her chances of publishing fiction, and adds, "Without the outrageously aggressive encouragement of my sister, Chicagoan Lorry—affectionately dubbed The Pusher—I probably would not have succeeded."

Although Donna Bell lives in Leavenworth, Kansas, she writes and sells advertising for a weekly Missouri newspaper, The Landmark. *She has requested that her first story be dedicated to the memory of her son, Mark . . .*

OUT OF THE WOODS

by DONNA BELL

Cora had made up her mind about one thing.

She was going to outlive Martin.

One way or another.

A small, trepid woman, Cora had reached the age where everyone began to vaguely resemble someone she had once known and could not quite recall.

She was forever approaching strangers, tentatively touching their arm, and, with a mixture of anticipation and apology, querying, "Excuse me, aren't you—?"

Of course, they never were, and Cora would feel momentarily disappointed, recovering quickly—until her next inevitable encounter.

This pattern of quaint behavior embarrassed and angered Cora's husband, a rigid, unimpressionable man, but then almost everything Cora did, from the day of their marriage, angered and embarrassed Martin.

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She could hardly remember ever being a young woman. But surely she did not imagine having been optimistic, full of ebullience? Where had all those passions gone?

She knew. They had been stomped on. Stifled and suffocated by Martin. Cora's azure eyes filmed over with forty years of resentment and regret. They did that frequently these days. For although Cora had changed from her younger days, Martin had not changed a bit. Oh, physically, of course—with a pouch and hair dyed black—but, character and personality, Martin was still Martin. Arrogant, selfish, and demanding.

It had taken only two short weeks after their marriage for her to realize what a terrible mistake she had made. Expected to make an early, secure marriage, the dutiful daughter became the dutiful wife upon her first proposal.

There had been no children, for which Cora was quietly grateful, having no wish to bring babies into their strained cloistered world. Friends? Impossible. Their own uneasy relationship made others uncomfortable, and although many people warmed to Cora they found Martin the proverbial pompous ass.

And so they lived together for forty dreary years, in their small house—where she could never do anything right. It had taken its toll on Cora, who through the years had developed all kinds of peculiar nervous habits. Chronically sighing and short of breath, she was a victim of trembling, twitching, and tics. She had tonics and pills for every known illness and some unknown.

Martin, on the other hand, was healthy as a horse. She doubted that old cliché. It seeemed to Cora that horses just couldn't make their aches and pains known. Except when they broke a leg—and everybody knew what happened then.

Break a leg, Martin, break a leg.

But, of course, Martin wasn't a horse—and Cora had no idea how one murdered a man. She was, in truth, still recovering from her first dismal failure. Catastrophic.

Not only had she been unsuccessful, but it had been devastating to learn that her doctor of thirty years was a senile, deceitful fraud. To think how carefully she had emptied the capsules, her own prescribed barbiturates, into Martin's nightcap. The tension she had felt waiting for them to dissolve! She had deliberately denied herself those capsules, strangely not suffering from insomnia at all in the interim. Of course, *now* she knew why.

Cora had fully expected Martin to complain about the drink. He

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always did. Too bitter, too sweet. Too fizzy, too flat. She sucked in her breath, remembering her shock when Martin, dapper as usual, had come down for his breakfast.

That morning she would have been the first to agree he had a right to complain about the breakfast she served him. Which, naturally, he did, until she wanted to scream, "Shut up, Martin, just shut up! You're not even supposed to *be* at this table! Or *any* table!"

For the rest of that day, she had transferred her anger to the doctor. All those years he had been giving her placebos! Nothing but sugar pills! Then, pulling herself together, she had realized he'd done her an enormous favor. What had she been thinking of? Certainly not the autopsy. For there would have been one. She had not even *considered* disposal of the body. She shuddered. It was so simple in books. So easy in films.

She certainly couldn't use any gory means. The sight of blood set off her nerves. That ruled out knives and such. Should she have another try with poison—the real thing this time? Something of a common, household nature? Still unaccountable?

With all her intense ruminating, Cora sighed, twitched, and trembled less. She experienced a resurgence of energy. She began taking long walks in the thick woods behind the cottage. She had been there seldom since she and Martin had walked there hand in hand the year they had moved in, so long ago. It was like an entire new world, full of lush, tangled, mysterious growth, ferns of wispy fronds and tiny wild flowers. In the evenings, Cora attempted to interest Martin in her descriptions of her small, pleasurable discoveries: the berry patch, the bird she couldn't identify, the deer with its fawn.

Martin was disdainful, dismissing it all. "Surely you have better things to do," he said and: "I'm surprised you could find your way out of the woods." That had cut her off before she could tell him of her narrow escape. Once she *had* fallen. Dangerously.

Of course, her mind had been busy, mulling over "Martin's murder."

When had she become so callous? Her thought processes were like silently conversing with a stranger, someone she didn't know—someone who thought about placing an electric fan on Martin's tub, to fall in accidentally, someone who knew a hit man, skilled in nefarious ways to end a life.

However, having become so preoccupied, Cora's health had actually improved vastly, and one evening, crocheting quietly in the

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living room while Martin read, she began to hum softly as she carried on a vigorous mental debate with her upstairs executioner.

"Do stop, Cora. You never could carry a tune."

"What? What did you say, Martin?" Glancing up, she caught him unaware. He was eyeing her, not with mere annoyance, but with intensity. An intensity of what? Dislike? Disgust? *Hate? Oh, Martin—you, too? You, too?*

He stood abruptly. "I'm going to bed. You lock up."

"Good night, Martin." Cora sighed.

Nothing upset Martin more than a disruption of his routine. The next evening upon his arrival home, Cora was not in the kitchen—or anywhere else in the house. His dinner was not prepared. He strode to the back door, calling out into the dusk, "Cora? Cora! Are you out there?"

The early evening was heavy with the sound of cicadas. Only fireflies and the darkening outline of the woods were visible.

A sickle leaned against the side of the house next to the back door and Martin grabbed it as he started toward the woods. It might come in handy—he had no idea how dense the underbrush would be. Drat that woman. What if something *had* happened to her?

"Cora?" he called. "Cora?"

Was it concern or frustration he felt? He didn't know.

Cora knew. She could *feel* anger in his voice.

"Cora! Answer me!"

The tic pulled hard at the muscle in her cheek. She peeked through the brush, crouching down, barely able to make out the figure of Martin approaching. *What was that he was carrying?*

Oh, my God! Oh, my God!

That moment last night when their eyes had locked flashed into her mind. Gasping, running on adrenaline, she moved rapidly in the direction away from Martin, finally dropping to the ground, crawling and clawing frantically, searching for the discovery she hadn't told Martin about, because he had cut her off.

Touching the rotted boards, she cried out in relief, tugging at them, somebody else's fingers becoming bloodied as she grabbed at branches sharp with thorns, breaking them, throwing them down wildly on the boards. Her breath seemed amplified, labored, echoing back to her through the purple dark. For one horrifying moment, she thought someone was beside her, breathing hurtfully into her

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ears. But there was only the sound of her own inhaling and exhaling, faster and faster.

Finally she stood and called out, "Here! I'm over here, Martin!"

How large he loomed, a gelatinous silhouette spreading shapelessly toward her.

"Here, Martin—over here!"

He turned toward the sound of her voice, dropping the sickle in his eagerness, surprised at the rush of relief he felt at knowing she was safe.

He felt almost like a young man again. His pace quickened and his arms were outstretched. His features were shadowed by the dusk so Cora didn't see the surprise frozen on his face as he plummeted down the old abandoned well, his arms flailing, clutching at empty twilight air.

She sat on the damp ground beside the gaping hole all through the night. It was very still. And then, as the sun came up—as bright and pink as the stains on the dress she had twisted and kneaded with her bloodied fingers—she unbent her stiff, cramped body.

Standing, she smoothed out her dress. Meticulously. Over and over, over and over, until the sun was mid morn.

Then, carrying her sadness, Cora walked out of the woods to report the accident.

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a *NEW* short story by

RUTH RENDELL

Rita would have preferred a terraced cottage in Inverness Street with a big garden and not so many stairs. But Norman had set his heart on the townhouse and was capable of sulking for months if he didn't get his own way. Besides, there was nothing to show a murder had taken place there . . .

HARE'S HOUSE

by RUTH RENDELL

A murderer had lived in the house, the estate agent told Norman. The murder had in fact been committed there, he said. Norman thought it very open and honest of him.

"The neighbors would have mentioned it if I hadn't," said the estate agent.

Now Norman understood why the house was going cheap. It was what they called a townhouse, though Norman didn't know why they did as he had seen plenty like it in the country. There were three floors and an open-tread staircase going up the center. About fifteen years old, the estate agent said, and for twelve of those no one had lived in it.

"I'm afraid I can't give you any details of the case."

"I wouldn't want to know," said Norman. "I'd rather not know." He put his head round the door of the downstairs bathroom. He had never thought it possible he might own a house with more than one bathroom. Did he seriously consider owning this one then? The price was so absurdly low! "What was his name?"

"The murderer? Oh, Hare. Raymond Hare."

Rather to his relief, Norman couldn't remember any Hare murder case. "Where is he now?"

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"He died in prison. The house belongs to a nephew."

"I like the house," Norman said cautiously. "I'll have to see what my wife says."

The area his job obliged him to move into was a more prestigious one than where they now lived. A terraced cottage like the ones in Inverness Street was the best he had thought they could run to. He would never find another bargain like this one. If he hadn't been sure Rita would find out about the murder, he would have avoided telling her.

"Why is it so cheap?" she said.

He told her.

She was a small thick-set woman with brown hair and brown eyes and a rather large pointed face. She had a way of extending her neck and thrusting her face forward. It had once occurred to Norman that she looked like a mole, though moles of course could be attractive creatures. She thrust her head forward now.

"Is there something horrible you're not telling me?"

"I've told you everything I know. I don't know any details." Norman was a patient and easygoing man, if inclined to be sullen. He was rather good-looking, with a boyish face and brown curly hair. "We could both go and see it tomorrow."

Rita would have preferred a terraced cottage in Inverness Street with a big garden and not so many stairs. But Norman had set his heart on the townhouse and was capable of sulking for months if he didn't get his own way. Besides, there was nothing to *show* Hare had lived there. Rather foolishly perhaps, Rita now thought, she had been expecting bloodstains or even a locked room.

"I've no recollection of this Hare at all, have you?"

"Let's keep it that way," said Norman. "You said yourself it's better not to know. I'll make Mr. Hare the nephew an offer, shall I?"

The offer was accepted and Norman and Rita moved in at the end of September. The neighbors on one side had lived there eight years and the neighbors on the other six. They had never known Raymond Hare. A family called Lawrence who had lived in their large old house surrounded by garden for more than twenty years must have known him, at least by sight, but Norman and Rita had never spoken to them save to pass the time of day.

They had builders in to paint the house and they had new carpets. There were only two drawbacks and one of those was the stairs. You

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found yourself always running up and down to fetch things you had forgotten. The other drawback was the bathroom window—or more specifically, the catch on the bathroom window.

Sometimes, especially when she was alone and Norman was at work, Rita would wonder exactly where the murder had taken place. She would stand still, holding her duster, and look about her and think maybe it was in that room or that one or in their bedroom. And then she would go into the bedroom, thrusting her head forward and peering. Her mother used to say she had a "funny feeling" in the corners of some houses, she said she was psychic. Rita would have liked to have inherited this gift but she had to admit she experienced no funny feelings in any part of this house.

She and Norman never spoke about Raymond Hare. They tended to avoid the very subject of murder. Rita had once enjoyed detective stories but somehow she didn't read them any more. It seemed better not to. Her next-door neighbor Dorothy, the one who had lived there eight years, tried one day to talk to her about the Hare case but Rita said she'd rather not discuss it.

"I quite understand," Dorothy said. "I think you're very wise."

It was a warm house. The central heating was efficient and the windows were double-glass except for the one in the upstairs bathroom. This bathroom had a very high ceiling and the window was about ten feet up. It was in the middle of the house and therefore had no outside wall, so the architect had made the roof of the bathroom just above the main roof, thus affording room for a window. It was a nuisance not being able to open it except by means of the pole with the hook on the end of it that stood against the bathroom wall, but the autumn was a dull wet one and the winter cold so for a long time there was no need to open the bathroom window at all.

Norman thought he would have a go at retiling the downstairs bathroom himself and went to the library to look for a do-it-yourself decorating manual. The library, a small branch, wasn't far away, being between his house and the tube station. Unable at first to find *Skills and Crafts,* his eye wandered down through *Horticulture, Botany, Biology, General Science, Social Sciences, Crime . . .*

Generally speaking, Norman had nothing to do with crime these days. He and Rita had even stopped watching thriller serials on television. His impulse was to turn his eyes sharply away from these accounts of trials and reconstructions of murders—and turn them

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away he did but not before he had caught the name Hare on the spine of one of the books.

Norman turned his back. By a happy chance he was facing the section labelled *Interior Decoration*. He found the book he wanted. Then he stood holding it and thinking. Should he look again? It might be that the author's name was Hare and had nothing at all to do with his Hare. Norman didn't really believe this. His stomach began to feel queasy and he was conscious of being rather excited, too. He turned round and quickly took the book off the shelf. Its title was *Murder in the Sixties*, the author was someone called H. L. Robinson, and the cases examined were listed on the jacket: Renzini and Boyce, the Oasthouse Mystery, Hare, the Pop Group Murders.

Norman opened it at random. He found he had opened it in the middle of the Hare case. A page or two further on were two photographs, the top one of a man with a blank, characterless face and half closed eyes, the other of a smiling, fair-haired woman. The caption said that above was Raymond Henry Montagu Hare and below Diana Margaret Hare, Née Kentwell. Norman closed the book and replaced it on the shelf. His heart was beating curiously hard. When his do-it-yourself book had been stamped, he had to stop himself actually running out of the library. What a way to behave! he thought. I must get a grip on myself. Either I am going to put Hare entirely out of my mind and never think of him again or else I am going to act like a rational man, read up on the case, make myself conversant with the facts, and learn to live with them.

He did neither. He didn't visit the library again. When his book had taught him all it could about tiling, he asked Rita to return it for him. He tried to put Hare out of his mind but this was too difficult. Where had he committed the murder was one of the questions he often asked himself and then he began to wonder whom he had killed and by what means. The answers were in a book on a shelf not a quarter of a mile away. Norman had to pass the library on his way to the station each morning and on his way back each night. He took to walking on the other side of the street. Sometimes there came into his mind that remark of Rita's that there might be something horrible he wasn't telling her.

Spring came early and there were some warm days in March. Rita tried to open the bathroom window, using the pole with the hook on the end, but the catch wouldn't budge. When Norman came home,

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she got him to borrow a ladder from Dorothy's husband Roy and climb up and see what was wrong with the catch.

Norman thought Roy gave him rather a funny look when he said what he wanted the ladder for. He hesitated before saying Norman could have it.

"It's quite okay if you'd rather not," Norman said. "I expect I can manage with the steps if I can find a foothold somewhere."

"No, no, you're welcome to the ladder," said Roy and he showed Norman the bathroom in his own house, which was identical to the next door's except that the window had been changed for a blank sheet of glass with an extractor fan.

"Very nice," said Norman, "but just the same I'd rather have a window I can open."

That brought another funny look from Roy.

When he got it home, Norman propped the ladder against the wall and climbed up to the window and saw why it wouldn't open. The two parts of the catch, a vertical bolt and a slot for it to be driven up into, had been wired together. Norman supposed that the builders doing the painting had wired up the window catch, though he couldn't imagine why. He undid the wire, slid down the bolt, and let the window fall open to its maximum capacity of about seventy-five degrees.

On April first, the temperature dropped to just on freezing and it snowed. Rita closed the bathroom window. She took hold of the pole, reached up and inserted the hook in the ring on the bottom of the bolt, lifted the window, closed it, pushed up the bolt into the slot, and gave it a twist. When she came out of the bathroom onto the landing, she stood looking about her and wondering where Hare had committed the murder. For a moment she fancied she had a funny feeling about that but it passed. She went down to the kitchen and made herself a cup of tea. She looked out into the tiny square of garden onto which fluffy snow was falling and melting when it touched the grass. There would have been room in the garden in Inverness Street to plant bulbs, daffodils, and narcissi. Rita sighed. Then the kettle whistled. She poured out the tea and was stirring sugar into her cup when there came a loud crash from upstairs. She nearly jumped out of her skin.

She ran up the two flights of stairs, wondering what on earth had got broken. There was nothing. Nothing was out of place or changed. She had heard of haunted houses where loud crashes were due to

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poltergeist activity. Her mother had always been able to sense the presence of a poltergeist. Rita felt afraid and sweat broke out on her rather large pointed face. Then she noticed the bathroom door was closed. Had it been that door closing she had heard? Surely not. She opened the bathroom door and saw that the window had fallen open. So that was all it was. She got the pole and inserted the hook in the ring on the bolt, slid the bolt upwards into the slot, and gave it a twist.

It had been rather windy but the wind dropped. Next day the weather began to warm up again. Norman opened the bathroom window and it remained open until rain started. Rita closed it.

"That window's not the problem I thought it might be once you get the hang of using the pole," said Norman.

He was trying to be cheerful and to act as if nothing had happened. The man called Lawrence who lived opposite had got into conversation with him on his way home. They had found themselves sitting next to each other in the tube train.

"It's good to see someone living in your place at last. An empty house always gets a run-down look."

Norman just smiled. He had started to feel uneasy.

"My wife knew Mrs. Hare quite well, you know."

"Really?" said Norman.

"A nice woman. There was no reason for what he did as far as anyone could tell. But I imagine you've read it all up and come to terms with it. Well, you'd have to, wouldn't you?"

"Oh, yes," said Norman.

Because he had his neighbor with him, he couldn't cross the street to avoid passing the library. Outside its gates, he had an almost intolerable urge to go in and take that book from the shelf. One thing he knew now, whether he wanted to or not, was that it was his wife Hare had murdered.

Some little while after midnight he was awakened by a crash. He sat up in bed.

"What was that?"

"The bathroom window, I expect," said Rita, half asleep.

Norman got up. He took the pole, inserted the hook into the ring on the bolt, slid up the bolt, and gave it a firm clockwise twist. The rest of the night passed undisturbed.

Rita opened the window two or three days later because it had turned warm. She went into their bedroom and changed the sheets

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and thought, for no reason as far as she could tell, I wonder if it was his wife he murdered? I expect it was his wife. Then she thought how terrible it would be if he had murdered her in bed. Hare's bed must have stood in the same place as their own. It must have because of the position of the electric points. Perhaps he had come home one night and murdered her in bed.

A wind that was more like a gale started to make the house cold. Rita closed the bathroom window. About an hour after Norman got home, it blew open with a crash.

"It comes open," said Norman after he had shut it, "because when you close it you don't give the bolt a hard enough twist."

"It comes open because of the wind," said Rita.

"The wind wouldn't affect it if you shut it properly." Norman's handsome face wore its petulant look and he sulked rather for the rest of the evening.

Next time the window was opened, petals from fruit-tree blossom blew in all over the dark-blue carpet. Rita closed it an hour or so before Norman came home. Dorothy was downstairs having a cup of tea with her.

"I'd have that window wired up if I were you," said Dorothy, and she added oddly, "to be on the safe side."

"It gets so hot in there."

"Leave it open, then, and keep the door shut."

The crash of the window opening awoke Norman at two in the morning. He was furious. He made a lot of noise about closing it in order to wake Rita.

"I told you that window wouldn't come open if you gave the bolt a hard enough twist! That crashing scares the hell out of me! My nerves can't stand it!"

"What's wrong with your nerves?"

Norman didn't answer. "I don't know why you can't master a simple knack like that."

"It isn't me, it's the wind."

"Nonsense. Don't talk such nonsense. There is no wind."

Rita opened the window in order to practice closing it. She spent about an hour opening and closing it and giving the bolt a firm clockwise twist. While she was doing this, she had a funny feeling. She had the feeling someone was standing behind her, watching what she did. Of course, there was no one there. She meant to leave the window open as it was a dry, sunny day, but she had closed it

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for perhaps the tenth time when the phone rang. The window, therefore, remained closed and Rita forgot about it.

She was pulling up weeds in the tiny strip of front garden when a woman who lived next door to the Lawrences came across the road, rattled a tin at her, and asked for a donation for Cancer Research.

"I hope you don't mind my telling you how much I like your bedroom curtains."

"Thank you very much," said Rita.

"Mrs. Hare had white net. Of course, that was a few years back. You don't mind sleeping in that bedroom, then? Or do you use one of the back rooms?"

Rita's knees felt weak. She was speechless.

"I suppose it isn't as if he actually did the deed in the bedroom. More just outside on the landing, wasn't it?"

Rita gave her a pound to get rid of her. She went upstairs and stood on the landing and felt very funny indeed. Should she tell Norman? How could she tell him, how could she begin, when they had never once mentioned the subject since they moved in? Norman never thought about it, anyway—she was sure of that.

She watched him eating his supper as if he hadn't a care in the world. The window crashed open just as he was starting on his pudding. He jumped up with an angry shout.

"You're going to come with me into that bathroom and I'm going to teach you how to shut that window if it's the last thing I do!"

He stood behind her while she took the pole and inserted the hook into the ring on the bolt, pushed the bolt up, and gave it a firm twist.

"There, you see? You've turned it the wrong way. I said clockwise. Don't you know what clockwise means?"

Norman opened the window and made Rita close it again. This time she twisted the bolt to the right. The window crashed open before they had reached the foot of the stairs.

"It's not me, you see! It's the wind!" Rita cried.

Norman's voice shook with rage. "The wind couldn't blow it open if you closed it properly. It doesn't blow it open when I close it."

"You close it then and see! Go on, you do it!"

Norman closed it. The crash awakened him at three in the morning. He got up, cursing, and went into the bathroom. Rita jumped out of bed and followed him. Norman came out of the bathroom with

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the pole in his hand, his face red, and his eyes bulging. He shouted at Rita:

"You got up after I was asleep and opened that window and closed it your way, didn't you?"

"I did *what?*"

"Don't deny it! You're trying to drive me mad with that window! You won't get the chance to do it again!"

He raised the pole and brought it down with a crash on the side of Rita's head. She gave a dreadful hoarse cry and put up her hands to try and ward off the rain of blows. Norman struck her five times with the pole and she was lying unconscious on the landing floor before he realized what he was doing. He threw the pole down the stairwell, picked Rita up in his arms, and phoned for an ambulance.

Rita didn't die. She had a fractured skull and a broken jaw and collarbone but she would survive. When she regained consciousness and could move her jaw again, she told the people at the hospital she had got up in the night and fallen over the banisters and all the way down the stairwell in the dark. The curious thing was that she seemed to believe this herself.

Alone and remorseful, Norman kept thinking how odd it was there had nearly been a second murder under this roof. He went to the estate agents and told them he wanted to put the house back on the market. Hare's House, he always called it to himself these days, never "my house" or "ours." They looked grave and shook their heads, but brightened up when Norman named the very low figure he intended to ask.

Now he was going to be rid of the house, Norman began to feel differently about Hare. He wouldn't have minded knowing what Hare had done—the details, the facts. One Saturday afternoon a prospective buyer came, was in raptures over Norman's redecorations and the tiles in the downstairs bathroom, and didn't seem to care at all about Hare. This encouraged Norman, and as soon as the man had gone he went down the road to the library where he got out *Murder in the Sixties*. He read the account of the case after getting back from visiting Rita in hospital.

Raymond and Diana Hare had been an apparently happy couple. One morning their cleaner arrived to find Mrs. Hare beaten to death and lying in her own blood on the top landing outside the bathroom door. Hare had soon confessed. He and his wife had had a midnight dispute over a window that continually came open with a crash and

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in the heat of anger he had attacked her with a wooden pole. Not a very interesting or memorable murder. Robinson, in his foreword, said he had included it among his four because what linked them all was a common lack of any kind of understandable motive.

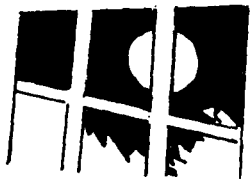
But how could I have tried to do the same thing, and for the same reason? Norman asked himself. Is Hare's house haunted by an act, by a motiveless urge? Or can it be that the first time I looked into that book I saw and read more than my conscious mind took in but not more than was absorbed by my *unconscious?* A rational man must believe the latter.

He borrowed the ladder from Roy to climb up and once more wire the window catch.

"By the way," he said. "I've been meaning to ask you. It's not the same pole, is it?"

"Your one, you mean? The same as Hare's? Oh, no, I don't know what became of that one. In some police museum, I expect. You've got ours. When we had our window done, we offered ours to Mr. Hare the nephew and he was very glad to accept."

Norman found a buyer at last. Rita was away convalescing and he was obliged to find a new home for them in her absence. Not that he had much choice after the miserable sum he got for Hare's house. He put a deposit on one of the terraced cottages in Inverness Street, hoping poor Rita wouldn't mind too much.



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a *NEW* Jeffery Rand story by

EDWARD D. HOCH

"Do you ever think about coming back to us?" Hastings asked.

"No." Rand started to put the tickets safely away in his billfold. "Leila and I are quite happy as we are."

"There's so much you could do, even on a part-time basis. Just talking to people, for instance." Hastings paused, averting Rand's gaze, and added, "Like Sergio Guendella."

"Who's Sergio Guendella?"

"I see you really don't keep up with the opera. He's singing the role of Barnaba in La Gioconda."

"I see." Rand removed the tickets and dropped them back on Hastings' desk . . .

THE SPY WHO WENT TO THE OPERA

by EDWARD D. HOCH

Rand was on one of his periodic visits to London when his old chief Hastings took the two tickets from his desk and passed them over. "Do you and Leila ever go to the opera?" he asked.

"I doubt if I've been to one in fifteen years," Rand admitted, "though we sometimes watch one on television."

"Well, here are two good seats for *La Gioconda* at Covent Garden on Friday evening. I'm sure Leila will enjoy it."

Rand hesitated. He'd never known Hastings to be so generous without expecting something in return. Still, he'd helped the man out of a difficult situation last summer and perhaps this was merely

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Hastings' way of repaying him. "No strings?" he asked with a slight smile.

"Of course not." Hastings shuffled some papers on his desk. "Honestly, Rand, your old department isn't the same since you retired. All these bright young men solving ciphers with their computers. I doubt if one of them ever heard of a Vigenere or a Pigpen."

"I'm sure they get the job done."

"Do you ever think about coming back to us?"

"No." Rand started to put the tickets safely away in his billfold. "Leila and I are quite happy as we are."

"There's so much you could do, even on a part-time basis. Just talking to people, for instance." Hastings paused, averting Rand's gaze, and added, "Like Sergio Guendella."

"Who's Sergio Guendella?"

"I see you really don't keep up with opera. He's singing the role of Barnaba in *La Gioconda.*"

"I see." Rand removed the tickets and dropped them back on Hastings' desk.

"Oh, really now, Rand—I'm not asking you to do anything except talk to the man. Go backstage after the performance and tell him how much you enjoyed it."

"How will they allow me backstage?"

"He'll be expecting you. He'll leave word that you and Leila are to be admitted to his dressing room."

"And what do I say to him?" Rand asked, still not retrieving the tickets from the desk.

Hastings leaned back in his chair, trying to appear at ease, as if the little favor he was asking was the most natural thing in the world. "Well, you see, the entire company's leaving for Warsaw soon. We'd like Sergio to contact a friend of ours there, if he's able."

"Since when do you use opera singers as couriers, Hastings?"

"Oh, it's nothing like that. But naturally he'll be entertained by the Polish arts world during his stay. He'll have natural social contact with some dissident factions."

"How would I approach him on this?"

"I don't have to tell you, Rand. Chat with him casually. Make the suggestion obliquely. You know the drill."

"Backstage, after the performance? Won't there be people dropping in?"

"You'll find a way. I have confidence in your abilities." Rand

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thought he said it with just a twinkle in his eyes. He sighed and picked up the tickets, wondering what Leila would think of all this.

Leila didn't think very much of it. "But Jeffery, you *know* that's the night of my lecture at the university!" she said. She taught a course in archaeology at nearby Reading and occasionally gave evening lectures on special occasions.

"I forgot," Rand said. "I'll phone Hastings right now and tell him to get someone else. He must have a dozen bright young chaps in the department who'd love a night at the opera."

But he found it was not so easy getting off Hastings' hook. "Oh, come now, Rand, couldn't you go alone?"

"I'd really stand out then, wouldn't I? A lone male going backstage to see Guendella after the show? Who knows? Maybe the Russians are watching the cast, too. They'd spot me in a moment without a wife in tow."

"Very well," Hastings said cheerfully. "I suppose we can supply you with a wife for the night."

Rand had no immediate answer.

It developed that the woman's name was Vesper O'Shea, and as Leila remarked upon hearing it, "Her name alone is enough to make me jealous."

Rand went off to London on the Friday-afternoon train, having arranged to meet Vesper O'Shea for a bite to eat before the theater. They dined at an inexpensive restaurant on the Strand, a few blocks from the Royal Opera House at Covent Garden.

Vesper proved to be an attractive young woman in her late twenties who worked as a code clerk in Rand's old Department of Concealed Communications.

"I understand we're to be married for the night," she said with a smile, extending her hand in greeting.

"Only till after the opera, unfortunately," Rand replied, steering her to a table in a far corner of the crowded restaurant. After they'd ordered a drink, he asked, "Are you enjoying Double-C?"

"Oh, yes. I only wish I'd been there when you were in charge. They still talk of you as sort of a grand old man." She grinned at him. "Frankly, I'd expected someone with white hair and a cane."

"Thanks." He raised his drink to her. "How did you happen to get chosen for tonight?"

"Hastings knows I like opera. He thought I could fill you in on the libretto."

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"He told you about seeing Sergio Guendella afterward?"

"Yes."

"What do you think?"

She shrugged. "I think it's ironic. Sergio plays a spy in the opera, you know. A man called Barnaba. He's a terrible villain—a spy for the Inquisition in Seventeenth Century Venice who plots to destroy a nobleman in love with the title character so he can have her for himself. In the end, Gioconda kills herself rather than submit to him."

"Sounds like a lot of laughs."

"Well, one goes to an opera for the music, not the plot. Actually, *La Gioconda* is rarely performed in London, though it's had many successful productions in New York. Some of the greatest stars of opera have performed in it—Enrico Caruso, Ezio Pinza, Gladys Swarthout, Richard Tucker, Maria Callas, Eileen Farrell—"

"Did you memorize all that for my benefit?"

She shrugged. "I just have a good memory for facts. It comes in handy in this business." He wondered if she meant spying or the opera.

After dinner, they set off on foot for Covent Garden. When they'd taken their seats on the left side of the orchestra, near the front, Vesper had more facts for him. "The music in *La Gioconda* is by Ponchielli. He was Puccini's teacher and very famous in Italy, although *La Gioconda* is the only one of his operas to bring him universal renown. The libretto is by Tobia Gorrio, whose real name was Arrigo Boito. It was based upon a play by Victor Hugo and was first performed at La Scala in Milan on April 8, 1876."

"You even have the date memorized?"

"Well," she confessed, "I just read it here in the program."

The opera was in four acts, and as the curtain rose for the first of them Rand could see he was in for a long evening. The scene was a courtyard of a palace in Venice, where a festival was under way. As the townspeople sang, a tall burly man with a guitar stood off to one side, observing them. "That's Guendella," Vesper whispered. "He's disguised as one of the merrymakers in order to spy on them."

When the courtyard emptied of singers, Guendella as Barnaba took center stage and his powerful baritone filled the theater. He strummed his guitar as he sang, and though Rand could understand very little Italian he found himself marveling at the man's voice. "He's overheard something that tells him where a fugitive from the

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Inquisition is hiding," Vesper explained. "And he sings of his desire to snare his greatest prize—the street singer, La Gioconda."

As Barnaba finished, Gioconda herself entered with her blind mother. The part was sung by Amanda Faye, a young British soprano who had been getting much press attention because of her role opposite the great Guendella. Gradually, Rand found himself falling under the spell of the opera and he settled back to enjoy it.

But by the third act, he'd grown a bit restless again. Then scene two brought the familiar "Dance of the Hours," with a spectacularly staged masked ball, and his enthusiasm was rekindled. When the curtain finally descended following the death of Gioconda and Barnaba's last lament, Rand was on his feet applauding with everyone else.

"I think we've made an opera fan of you," Vesper announced happily.

"Not quite," Rand said. "But I appreciate good music. Guendella's voice is superb." He helped her squeeze through the crush of the crowd. "We'd better get backstage."

A young stagehand led them to the star's dressing room. Guendella was alone with Amanda Faye, the lovely Gioconda, as they entered. "Your guests are here, Sergio," she said with a smile. "I'll leave you with them and get out of my costume." She hurried out the door.

The baritone rose to greet them. "I couldn't introduce you," he said by way of apology. "The names—"

"I'm Jeffery Rand and this is my wife, Vesper. I wanted to tell you how much we enjoyed your performance."

"Ah, thank you. This is the first time I have done *Gioconda* in London, and the response has been overwhelming."

"I'm sure it will be just as overwhelming in Warsaw."

"Ah! You are a man who comes directly to the point! My manager said it was a matter in the national interest, and though I am not a British citizen I have always felt very close to your country. But you could have come to my hotel."

"It was felt this would seem more casual," Rand explained. "A great many people come backstage after a performance."

Guendella gestured toward his face. "Please—may I remove my makeup as we talk?"

"Certainly."

The baritone sat at the dressing table and smiled in the mirror

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at Vesper. "You have a charming young wife, Mr. Rand. It is good to have a young wife. It keeps one young in spirit."

Rand remained standing as he spoke. "Your journey to Warsaw could be quite important to us, sir. You will be there for two weeks, and we understand you are to be honored by several groups of Polish intellectuals including some dissidents."

"That is correct." Guendella was watching Rand in the mirror as he wiped the makeup from his face. "But what do you want me to do? Will I be a spy for you?"

"No—nothing like that. But every country has its dissidents. We have them in England, Lord knows. We want you to speak with them, especially with certain names on a list I'll be giving you, and perhaps ask them a few questions. These are mainly people we've been unable to reach by any other means. It's not exactly a free society over there, you know. Talk to them, ask them questions, and bring us back any information you can about their situation. We especially want to know about the chances of a revolt in the aftermath of the recent unrest. And we want to know what sort of an independent leader the intellectuals would support."

Sergio Guendella nodded. "You want the name of someone acceptable to the West who could—"

They were interrupted by a sudden knock at the door. It opened at once and a youngish bearded man in a bathrobe entered. Rand recognized him as Franc Bougois, the French tenor who'd sung the part of the nobleman Enzo in the evening's performance. "Pardon, Sergio—I did not know you had visitors."

"What is it, Franc?"

"A package was left for you at the stage door. I was passing by and said I'd bring it to you."

"Thank you, Franc." Guendella took it and set it down on his dressing table without a second glance. "A box of candy, no doubt," he told Rand. "An Italian interviewer once printed a story about my love of candy. Now fans send it to me everywhere."

Franc Bougois retreated, closing the door after him. "He's a very good tenor," Vesper commented.

"One of the best," Guendella agreed, rubbing at his face with a moisturized tissue. "But back to the business at hand. You want me to seek out and question Polish dissidents, and bring you a report of what I learn, correct?"

"Correct," Rand said, "though you put it a bit more bluntly than I did."

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"You understand that I cannot formally agree to work for you—for British intelligence, if I may use that phrase. But I will do what you wish. Where is this list of names?"

"Here in my pocket. Naturally we'll be happy to reimburse you for any expenses you incur, and to reward you with a small token of our appreciation."

Sergio Guendella held up a hand. "Do not speak of money. I am not in your employ."

"Of course not."

Rand handed him an envelope containing the list of names.

"We leave for Warsaw on the weekend," Guendella said.

Rand nodded and took Vesper's elbow. "The questions are in there, too. Good luck on your trip, and my thanks for a wonderful evening."

The baritone smiled. "*La Gioconda* is always a popular work. I suppose someone in your line can admire its violence and melodrama."

"I have no line of work," Rand said simply. "I'm retired."

He left the dressing room with Vesper, and after a quick drink at a nearby pub they parted. Rand caught the late train back to Reading, assuming incorrectly that the assignment was at an end.

When he woke up the following morning, the bedroom was bathed with sunlight and Leila was shaking him. "Jeffery, it's Hastings on the telephone from London. He says it's important."

He lifted his head from the pillow. "What time is it?"

"Quarter after eight. Time you were up, anyway."

He put on his slippers and robe and went to the phone. Hastings' voice was brisk and grim. "Rand, how did it go last night?"

"Fine. I thought Vesper would report to you."

"She's not in yet and there's a problem."

Rand sighed. There was always a problem. "What is it?"

"The Russian embassy sent a radio message to Moscow at 1:27 this morning, using their special diplomatic code—the one reserved for urgent dispatches. Do you want to hear it?"

"Not particularly." Still, the fact that Double-C could read the Russian diplomatic texts with such ease certainly interested him. These young chaps with their computers weren't half bad.

"Listen anyway," Hastings said. "It reads: *Guendella contacted by British agent on eve of Warsaw trip. Please instruct what action to take.* The signature is a code name: *Dean Lugel.*"

"Has there been a reply?"

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"Unfortunately, we're not quite as skillful at reading the Moscow-to-London messages. Something about the Moscow computer being more sophisticated at generating one-time ciphers. We'll get it in time, but it might take a day or so. I'm worried that Guendella might be in danger."

"Put a guard on him," Rand suggested, wishing he was back in bed.

"It looks as if we'll have to scrub the whole Warsaw mission now. There seems to be a spy in the opera company."

"Perhaps."

"What other explanation could there be?"

Rand didn't answer. Instead he asked, "Have you ever intercepted previous messages from this Dean Lugel?"

"Not that we can find. But he's probably using a changeable code name."

"Or no code name at all, since the entire message was already encoded. I'd suggest you check the university directories to see if there really is a Dean Lugel. And the ecclesiastical directories as well."

"Good idea. We'll get on it." He hesitated. "But, Rand—"

"What is it?"

"I wish you'd come in on this. We think that a warning should be passed to Sergio Guendella. We owe the chap that much."

"All right," Rand decided. "I'll be in as soon as possible."

"I'll look for you."

"One other thing—"

"What's that?"

"Did Vesper know the nature of the mission before last night?"

"Just in general terms, not specifically. Why do you ask?"

"No reason. Just curious."

After he hung up, Rand got out the program for the opera and went over the names of the large cast. There was no Lugel among them, but then he hadn't expected to find one.

When he arrived in London, Rand telephoned the hotel where Sergio Guendella was staying and asked to be put through to his room. When the baritone answered, Rand told him, "This is your friend from backstage last night."

"Oh, yes—how are you?"

"Fine. But there's been a change of plans. The word seems to have gotten out."

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"But how could that be?" Guendella asked, genuinely concerned.

"We're wondering the same thing. I called to warn you to be on your guard. We don't know what will happen."

"Who could—?"

"Did you talk to any of the other cast members about it? Amanda Faye or that Frenchman Bougois, for example?"

"Certainly not!"

"There must have been someone, after I left the theater. Did you talk to anyone at all last night?"

"No one but my manager."

"What did you tell him?"

"He knew someone was coming. Your people contacted him first, remember? I said you'd stopped in after the performance and we had a nice chat. I gave him no details."

"What's your manager's name?"

"Hyram Wendel. His office is here in London."

Rand jotted down the address and then, with a final warning to Guendella, hung up.

Twenty minutes later he stepped out of a taxi just off Fleet Street and made his way up to a second-floor office in an old but well tended building.

Hyram Wendel was a man in his sixties with an unlit cigar in his mouth. He sounded more American than British as he greeted Rand. "What can I do for you? You want to book Sergio, the world's greatest baritone? Why else come to me on a Saturday?"

"I believe you were contacted regarding his forthcoming journey to Warsaw," Rand began.

"The opera's producers handled all that."

"No, I mean someone here in London asked you if Sergio might be willing to do a little private business while he was there."

"Oh, you're with those guys! Look, I'll tell you, mister, I don't want to know anything about it. I asked Sergio and he said sure, and I passed the word along. That's his own business."

"Who did you tell about it?"

"No one, not even my wife! I know when it's smart to shut up."

He seemed sincere enough, but that proved little. "What about the others in the cast?" Rand asked. "Do you represent any of them?"

"Amanda. I manage Amanda Faye. She and Sergio are close friends, you know what I mean? He wanted her for Gioconda."

"Had she ever sung the role before?"

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"Once, a few years back. Opera singers have a wide repertoire. Sometimes the same company will stage two or three different operas on successive nights."

"Do you know anything about Amanda's politics? Does she campaign for leftist causes?"

"No, nothing like that. She sticks to her singing."

"Well, thank you, Mr. Wendel. You've been a great help."

"I hope Sergio isn't in any kind of trouble."

"I hope so, too," Rand said.

When Rand reached his old office overlooking the Thames, he found that Hastings had been called away for a meeting with the Prime Minister. Instead, Vesper O'Shea was awaiting him in the outer office.

"Hastings left a message for you," she reported. "They've been unable to locate any Dean Lugel in church or education records, and he even checked the staff at the Russian embassy. None of them has a name even close to Lugel."

Rand nodded. "It's a code name. I suspected as much from the beginning. It probably changes every day or week, along with the cipher itself. Someone found out we'd contacted Sergio and had the embassy pass the word to Moscow."

"Someone in the oepra company?"

"Probably, but not necessarily." He told her about his meeting with Sergio's manager. "I'd suggest we get over to Covent Garden. There's a matinee performance today."

When they were still a few blocks away in Vesper's Fiat, Rand heard the sirens. By the time they'd parked a block away, the area around the opera house was filled with police cars, fire engines, and ambulances.

"What is it?" Rand asked a constable as Vesper flashed her Whitehall identification.

"Looks like a bomb, sir. Backstage."

He allowed them to pass the police line and Rand led the way over fire hoses to the stage door. The dressing-room area was a mass of confusion and they were stopped twice before they managed to reach Sergio Guendella.

He sat dazed in his dressing room while ambulance attendants finished bandaging his hands and arms. "Only powder burns," one of them told Rand, taking him for a police official. "He was lucky."

"A bomb?"

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A detective nodded. "But the main charge misfired. There was only a little flare-up when he opened the package."

Vesper tugged at Rand's sleeve, pointing to the scorched wrappings on the floor. "That looks like the package he received last night."

Rand crouched down in front of the dazed baritone and spoke to him. "This is Jeffery Rand. Do you recognize me?"

"Of course."

The detective looked nervous and tried to intervene. "Are you with the official police, sir?"

Vesper showed him her card. "This is a security matter."

"You'd better come with us in the ambulance, sir," the attendant was saying to Sergio. "We should take X-rays and check you over."

Suddenly Amanda Faye was in the room, pushing through the crowd to Guendella's side. "Sergio! What happened? They said there was a bomb!" She glared at Rand and Vesper. "Can't you move back and give him air?"

The baritone was struggling to stand up. "The matinee goes on in an hour—"

"Forget the matinee! Sit down and tell me what happened!"

"The box," he muttered. "The candy box that arrived last night. I unwrapped it and opened it, and it flared up!"

"It's a wonder you weren't killed!" She glanced around. "Where is this box?"

"The bomb squad removed it," someone explained.

Rand bent to pick up the torn wrappings, but other than Sergio's name and the address of the theater there were no markings. "Taking candy from a stranger wouldn't seem like a very good idea under any circumstances," he observed. "Mightn't it have been poisoned or drugged?"

"I am very careful," Sergio replied. "Usually there is a fan letter inside, but this time I found nothing."

Rand spotted the tenor, Franc Bougois, in the doorway. The crowd was thinning out as the firemen folded up the hoses and prepared to depart. "You brought that box to him last night after the performance," Rand said. "We were here at the time."

Bougois bristled at the veiled accusation. "It was left at the stage door. I know nothing of any bomb! Do you think I would harm Sergio? Without him singing Barnaba, the whole production would shut down and we would all be out of work!"

Someone from the management arrived to announce that they

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were canceling the afternoon performance. Although Sergio Guendella agreed to go to the hospital, he insisted he would be back for the evening show. He wouldn't allow them to carry him out on a stretcher and insisted on walking to the ambulance.

Rand accompanied him to the stage door. "Forget our conversation of last night," he advised. "I'm sorry we got you into all this."

"My friend, it is not your fault. One attracts enemies at times."

"In the company? A jealous tenor, perhaps?"

Sergio smiled. "You are very perceptive. But bombing would not be his manner."

"He brought you the package. Could anyone else have tampered with it in your dressing room?"

"No. The wrappings were undamaged, and I locked it in my drawer overnight."

"Did you ever hear the name Lugel before?"

Guendella thought about it. "I do not believe so."

"He may be a dean of some sort. Or Dean may be his name."

"No. But one meets so many people—" The ambulance attendants led him to the waiting vehicle as a cheer went up from a crowd of onlookers. Sergio acknowledged the greeting with a wave of his hand and climbed inside.

"We were too late," Vesper observed as the ambulance sped off.

"I've been a great deal later than this on occasion. At least he's not dead or badly injured."

"Hastings said this Lugel sent a message to Moscow. Do you think a reply came back to kill Sergio?"

"I don't know, but I think we should pay a return visit to the opera tonight. Just to make sure the next attempt isn't successful."

Somewhat to Rand's surprise, Hastings decided to accompany them to the evening performance of *La Gioconda*. "But won't that blow our cover?" Rand argued. "A great many people know you by sight."

"Not so many as you'd think. Government regulations prevent the press from publishing my name or photograph in connection with my intelligence work. If they know me, chances are they know you as well."

There were three tickets awaiting them at the Covent Garden box office. As they settled into their seats, an announcement was made that Sergio Guendella would be playing the role of Barnaba with bandaged hands as the result of an injury earlier in the day. Rand

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opened his program and settled back for the overture, a sweeping refrain based upon a theme from one of the first-act songs.

He glanced down at the title page of the program.

And suddenly he knew. It was as clear as that.

He sat through the four acts of the opera with growing impatience, anxious to get backstage. Finally, when Gioconda had once again plunged the dagger into her chest and Barnaba had sung his lament, Rand rose with the others for a standing ovation at the curtain call. Then he told Hastings, "Come on. We have to get backstage."

They hurried down the side aisle, with Vesper trailing along. "What's the rush?" she asked.

"I know who put the bomb in Sergio's candy box, and who sent the message to Moscow."

"This Dean Lugel fellow?" Hastings asked.

"Yes, Dean Lugel."

Then they were inside the dressing room and Rand had introduced Hastings. "Did you enjoy the performance?" Sergio asked him.

"Very much. Until that bomb, I was hoping you could demonstrate for us that you were as good a spy offstage as on."

"I think he's already demonstrated that," Rand said quietly. "How long have you been working for the Russians, Sergio?"

The blood drained from Guendella's face as he sat staring up at Rand. "I do not know what you mean."

"What I mean is that British intelligence tried to recruit you for exactly the same sort of mission you were already performing for the Russians. I imagine you've been contacting dissidents and leftist groups in western Europe and reporting back to Moscow on those that seemed ripe for further contact. You were quite willing to work for us, and I imagine you were just as willing to work for the other side when they approached you."

"You cannot know this!" the baritone protested. Then, turning to Hastings and Vesper, he said, "Do not believe a word of it! I was almost killed by their bomb!"

"The candy box supposedly containing the bomb was delivered to you last night," Rand observed, "hours before the spy's message requesting instructions went off to Moscow. You told me yourself that the wrappings hadn't been tampered with and the box was locked up overnight. So there could have been no bomb in that box when it was delivered—unless we're to believe in the coincidence of some fan with a grudge against you choosing this moment to

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strike. But such a person would have been far more likely to poison the candy than to rig up a bomb inside the box."

"Why would I risk killing myself with a bomb?" Sergio demanded. "The whole thing is foolishness!"

"There was no risk. You very carefully rigged it so you'd get powder burns on the hands and nothing more. The rest was acting. You *are* a superb actor, after all. As for your reason, when I phoned to tell you the word was out, you saw that you had to protect your own position. You feared we might begin to suspect you'd sent that message to Moscow yourself, so you faked the bombing."

Hastings was still frowning. "You mean Sergio is the mysterious Dean Lugel?"

Rand nodded. "We should have known it at once. This opera he's performing is about a spy, and the libretto is by Tobia Gorrio, whose real name was Arrigo Boito. Vesper told me that after reading the program last night and I was reminded of it when I looked at the program this evening. The author hid his identity with a simple anagram. Isn't it likely that a spy playing the lead in *La Gioconda* might choose to do the same thing? Dean Lugel is merely an anagram for Guendella."

The fight went out of Sergio, but Rand persisted. "He had the Russian embassy send his message telling Moscow he'd been approached by us, and asking for instructions. Then he faked the bomb attempt to keep us from suspecting him."

"What sort of spy would use a simple anagram to conceal his identity?" Vesper asked.

"A not very good one," Rand admitted. "But keep in mind that the entire message was transmitted in diplomatic code. It probably seemed safe enough to him at the time."

Hastings turned to Sergio Guendella. "How can we let you go back to them? You'll tell them we broke their code."

"Look," Sergio pleaded, holding out his hands. "I only want to sing, not to spy! I agreed to work for the Russians because I thought it would bring peace. That is why I sent the message, to warn them you wished to stir up the Polish dissidents. Maybe I was wrong. Maybe we should talk more. I will do whatever you ask."

Rand decided his work was finished. The rest was for Hastings and Vesper to work out. As he slipped out the stage door and headed for Paddington Station, he was glad to be retired.

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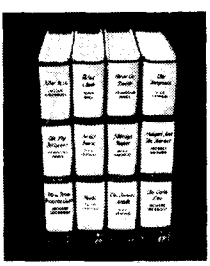

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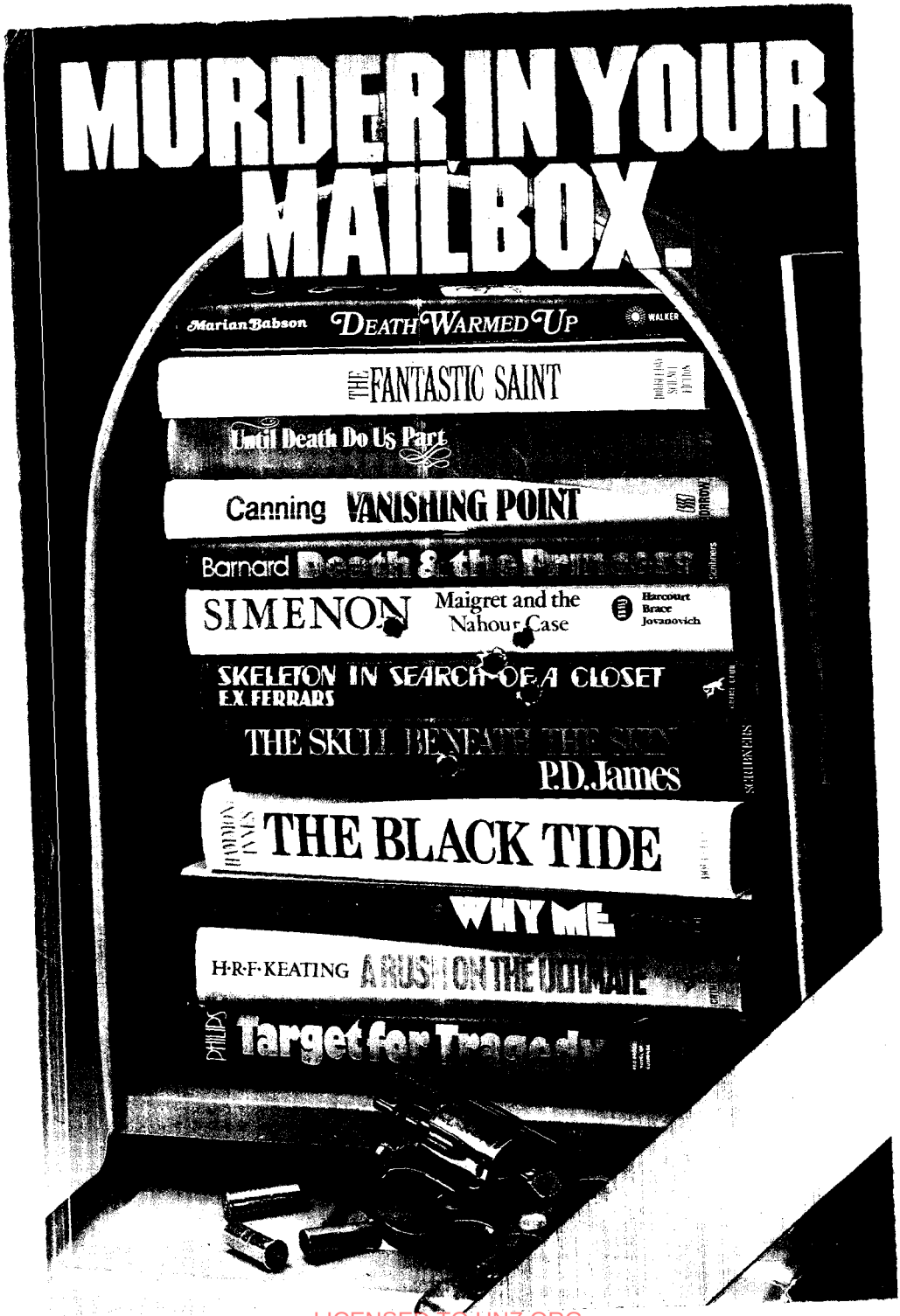

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